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ABSTRACT

Focusing on the contemporary theatre in Scutheast Asia, this journal issue sheds light cn the intercultural relationships that exist between that part of the world and the Western world. In addition to a transcript of a Balinese "topeng" (storytelling) performance, the journal contains eight articles that provide information on the follcwing topics: the ccnstruction of reality and unreality in Japanese theatre, visitation and illusion in the Mask Theatre of Abli, beccming a clown in Bali, the life in art of a Balinese shadow puppeteer, Teatr Loh in Indonesia in 1977-78, the Seraikella Chhau theatre in India, spirit cult festivals in South Kanara, the Teyyam Kettu (ritual performances) cf Ncrthern Kerala, and Kalarippayatt (the martial art of Kerala). (FL)

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The Drama Review

Performance Theory: Southeast Asia

Guest Editor: Richard Schechner

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Introduction:

Towards a Field Theory of Performance

by Richard Schechner

This was to be an issue on Asian theatre, then on South Asian theatre, then on Southeast Asian . . . the world always slaps the editor with its magnificent complexity as the pages allowed to show that world shrink. I threw consistency away. What's found print is a sampling, but a sampling with a method: steps towards a field theory of performance. I mean, some set of transformations that will make sense whether applied to Ibsen's dramas as staged in Oslo, Richard Foreman's pieces in his own theatre on lower Broadway, Noh in the Kanze Theatre in Tokyo, or Teyyam danced in the fields of northern Kerala. Also: connections between the "ritual process" and the performance process—between what goes on in non-ordinary life experience and art. And finally: the relationship between various kinds of preparations, rehearsals, means of getting the performance on (whether ritual or esthetic or both), to the "cooldown" period afterwards, the means of reintegration into ordinary living.

I tried to select some writings about performances that are not well-known in America. It's not a prejudice against Kathakali that led me to three other kinds of performances in southwest India. But we often get stuck on what we know, hindered in finding out the details of our ignorance. In India alone there are dozens of forms unknown to American theatre people: Jatra, Chhau, Kuttiatam, Raslila, to name a few. Just this year the first Yakshagana troupe toured America. And what's true of India is true of the rest of Asia.

The translation of Kakul's performance of Balinese Topeng is especially important. Topeng is a bountiful example of theatrical storytelling: a one-man show of many characters. This translation will help English speaking people to know how multiplex and contemporary the interweaving of verbal languages is. Many of the forms we have habitually called "visual" are truly verbo-visual. The foreign observer hasn't understood the languages spoken and therefore emphasizes the visuals. But even in our own language the same thing happens. Foreman's theatre is very literary, but his use of language is one channel in a multiplex system; it is hard to sort the language out. And once sorted out, it is difficult to understand it separate from its relations to the other visual and nonliterary sonic channels.

Almost all the writers in this issue of TDR have practiced the performances they describe. Sometimes they've tried to use what they've done to make a new kind of work, as Theatre Loh is, or in constructing an American version of a form, as John Emigh does, or in training actors, as with Kalarippayatt. Such crosscultural feeding is very traditional. What is "traditional" is finally what's remembered and repeated over the years. There's no culture uninfluenced by foreigners—invaders, evangelists (Muslim, Christian, Buddhist), traders, colonizers. I enjoy the way a Madras musician handles a European violin as much as I thrill to Glass's Tibetan sounds. And what's more Italian than (Chinese) spaghetti?

The Construction of Reality and Unreality in Japanese Theatre

by Alexander Alland, Jr.

The traditional performing arts of Japan (the various Gaku, Noh, Bunraku, and Kabuki) are built on a set of contrasts between understatement and exaggeration; between distance and immediacy. Both setting and performance exploit such negatives as stillness, distance, absence and separation, but these occur against a background of opulence ranging from the elaborate Noh costumes to the technical magic of the Kabuki stage, and the lifelike movements of the Bunraku puppets. Although contrasts predominate, mergings also occur in these theatre forms. Multiple evocations of the sacred appear in even the most secular of texts. One theatre genre evokes the others just as all the arts in Japan interpenetrate one another to a high degree. A constant feature of Japanese theatre is the consistent, if paradoxical, presence of the not-there which infuses the text and action to create a rich fabric of suggested meaning. It is this fact that connects Japanese classical theatre to modern experimental theatre in the West.

Japanese artistry in general depends upon strict adherence to the canons of traditional form handed down from generation to generation, from master to student. Only one who has assimilated the past is allowed to innovate, and innovation depends upon the elaboration of tradition rather than on a departure from it. As a baseline for discussion let us begin with the tea ceremony which, like Noh drama, has its roots in samurai culture and Buddhism. The tea ceremony is the most rigid of all performance genres. The ceremony employs a codified set of objects, movements, and operations. Its discipline is rigorous and is based on long years of practice. There should be absolutely no variation, no innovation, and no personal expression in the performance.

When in Japan in 1976, I often sat in stunned fascination before my TV as the weekly educational program on the tea ceremony unfolded. Again and again (down to the level of the instant replay) the rigidity of the ceremony was emphasized gesture by gesture. These gestures are structured to evoke humility and harmonious simplicity. Guests at a tea ceremony are equal regardless of rank and are served by a studiously self-effacing host. It is the most artful of deceptions.

The tea ceremony is performed by a single individual--a member of a coterie—in a private "theatre," the tea house—a space designed to reflect rustic intimacy. This space is the essence of refined understatement. In true Japanese fashion, however, the tea ceremony provides the ambience for a performance that contrasts with the host's overtly expressed humility as well as the "rustic" atmosphere. The tea provides the ideal setting for a privileged set of connoisseurs to view and contemplate fine art—the personal collection of the host. The following is a description of a memorable tea ceremony that occurred on 5 December 1933:

> *The waiting place comprised only two small rooms, one with four and the other two mats. On the desk ledge of the larger room was placed a gold lacquer ink-stone box of the Kamakura period for our appreciation. Meanwhile the elderly Baron Masuda appeared at the entrance of the waiting place and announced that the tea room was ready. He said nothing more but immediately retired. . . . We next entered the tea room, where our host was waiting for us. In the alcove of the room was hung an autograph of a high priest mounted with rare printed brocade called* inkin; *and on the hearth was placed an iron kettle called* ashiya-gama, *the design of which is said to have been drawn by Sesshu, a great master of priest painters in the fourteenth century. The kettle is said to have been once used by Jo-o, the great tea master in the sixteenth century. Our host came out and exchanged greetings with each of us. Then he engaged himself in making a fire in the hearth so as to have hot water in the kettle. The room was so small that we filled it and it was quite secluded from the outside world. We were all silently attentive to every movement of our host. . . .*
>
> *In such esthetic entertainment we spent the whole afternoon, enjoying the hospitality of our host, and the beauty of art and nature entirely secluded from the outside world of worries and depravity. Such is the way in which the Japanese collector appreciates art with his friends. This method was initiated in the fourteenth century by the Shogun Yoshimasa, a pioneer of the tea ceremony.*
>
> Noritake Tsuda, ***Handbook of Japanese Art***

The Japanese have developed gardening into an art form with a distinctly theatrical quality. Japanese gardens imitate nature in different degrees, but their naturalness is skillfully managed through meticulous planting, pruning, and training. While some are stroll gardens through which one is permitted to walk, others are to be admired only from the outside. These are particularly stage-like. One of the most famous is the Zen garden of the Royoan-Ji in Kyoto. The Royoan-Ji is a garden of absences. It is screened off on three sides by a mud-plaster wall and can be viewed only from the covered porch of the Royoan-Ji itself. It is composed of raked sand in which five groups of natural stone are set. It contains no plants except a green moss that has lately invaded the stone groups that constitute the major feature of the garden. This moss is the subject of some controversy since for purists, at least, it represents an unwanted intrusion on a permanently fixed imaginary landscape.

Japanese gardens reflect a humanized naturalism characterized by asymmetry and a relatively static quality. This is achieved through the use of evergreens, moss, stone and sand. The most severe Zen gardens may do away with plants all together. While these gardens may keep one out physically, they create a spatial enclosure for personal contemplation. David H. Engel, an American expert on Japanese gardens, points out that the circle, the rectangle and the triangle are the fundamental symbolic shapes structured into Japanese gardens. He says the following of the Royoan-Ji:

> *To discover in a garden the rectangle, triangle, and circle we must think in abstract terms. One day I went to see the famous rock, moss and sand garden of Royoan-Ji in Kyoto. I reasoned that the rectangle was the outline of the garden itself, the area of sand enclosed by a low earthern plaster wall. I then saw that a series of triangles were suggested by imaginary lines one might draw between the rocks within each group and between the rock groups themselves. But I searched in vain for the circle. Finally, I turned to my teacher. "Where is the circle?" I asked. My teacher smiled and said: "Stay here for a few hours. Relax. Quietly look at the garden and you will soon become part of it. The circle is you."*
>
> David H. Engel, ***Japanese Gardens Today***

One thus "enters" the Japanese garden through intense personal contemplation. The Noh theatre demands the same total response of its audience because it does not reach out like orthodox Western theatre. The Noh requires a delicately receptive and knowledgeable audience for complete appreciation. It draws one in through partial exclusion, however. The spectator is purposely kept at a distance from the Noh stage. The Noh theatre at the Itsukushima shrine is built on the edge of the Inland Sea. At high tide, the water flows around the stage separating it from the audience. All other traditional Noh spaces, even those built indoors, maintain substantial spatial and architectural distance between actors and audience. This is accomplished by roofing over the stage area and surrounding it with an apron or moat of white gravel. The audience sits beyond this gravel well outside the "stage house."

Like the tea house the Noh stage is disingenuously simple. The only backdrop consists of an ancient pine painted on the far wall of the main stage. This is the *Yogo* pine of the Kusuga shrine in Nara, Japan's oldest capital and one of its holiest places. The pine evokes nature and the sacred dramas that were performed in ancient times at the shrine itself. Props are limited to symbolic-abstract elements constructed anew for each performance. These suggest rather than affirm such objects as boats, planquins, and huts. Significantly the only realistic prop is a Buddhist temple bell used only in a single play.

Like the tea ceremony, the Noh performance is highly restrained. Takie Sugiyama Lebra, discussing a westerner's impression of Noh drama, has said the following of the tempo of Noh:

> *"To be boring, as the Noh play is undoubtedly boring, is merely another way of communicating." (Richie 1971:17.) Of course in this case, "boring" is the judgment of an alien observer who is not sensitized to the message behind the message. The message of a conversation is not what was said but what was not said; silence is communication. One should further note the importance of* ma, *a silent interval or pause, in Japanese music.*
>
> Takie Sugiyama Lebra, ***Japanese Patterns of Behavior***

The Noh is reflection. The action of the Noh play, if it can be said to be action, most often deals with a past event, or better, with an emotional tone created by that event. The actor is constrained by a highly stylized and limited conventional code. Donald Keene tells us that the Noh, among all theatres, makes the greatest demands on the audience. The lines, often spoken from behind a mask, are deliberately muffled. Each segment of the dialog is performed in a specific song-chant style and these styles change from speech to speech. The text is written in an archaic form of Japanese. In addition the texts are structured around ambiguities and word play. The music, an integral part of Noh drama, does not actually accompany the action. Instead it runs its independent course. It "proceeds virtually independently, decorating or heightening the passage, but not commenting on it. Even the drums 'acompanying' the singer may not play in his tempo."

The dance is also integral to the Noh performance. As one might expect, however, the movement is minimal and enigmatic. Apparently it has little relation to the surface action or to the character being portrayed. Yet the dance penetrates the play. It carries the text and evokes rather than expresses the emctional center of the performance.

> *The movements of the dance are unassertive but they express and epitomize the texts, not by crude miming . . . but by evolving the ultimate meaning, the "dignity" of the work. . . .*
>
> *The higher the "dignity" of a play, the fewer and simpler the movements of the dances; unable to distract by mere virtuosity, the actor must transmute each gesture into symbolic utterance.*
>
> Donald Keene, ***No: The Classical Theatre of Japan***

There are two major characters in Noh: the *shite* and the *waki*. The role of the *waki* is to call the *shite* to the stage and to serve as his interlocutor. The theme of the play is carried by the *shite*. In most Noh plays the *shite* wears a mask; the *waki* never does. These masks are carved to express intentionally an intermediate emotion. It is up to the actor, through speech and movement, to animate the mask: to make it express the subtle emotional qualities that are the essence of Noh. In those plays in which the *shite* performs without a mask his face is, according to Noh tradition, mask-like. Emotions are not to be expressed through mime. Again they must struggle through the actor's genius, to reach the surface and thus attain greater meaning. The *waki* too must maintain this mask-like aspect although wearing a mask is never a part of the *waki* performance. The avoidance of direct emotional expression or conflict in Noh drama is further strengthened in some plays by the *kokata*, or child actor, who takes several adult as well as child roles. People of high rank, such as the emperor, are played by *kokata*. These actors may also play opposite the *shite* as their lovers. This is an artifice to avoid any association with real romance. The *kokata*, whose actions are performed in a specially stylized mechanical manner, reduce their roles intentionally to a subsidiary place in the plays. They are given these roles in order to avoid undue distraction from the *shite* who must occupy the central place throughout the performance.

The major contrast in Noh theatre is between the unreality created by all the distancing mechanisms described and the realism that forces itself through the artifice. Thus essentially Noh theatre *is* realistic "in its evocations of what a woman experiences when deserted by her lover or what the taste of defeat is to a hitherto unvanquished warrior."

Noh is the ultimate performing art. Keene tells us that unstaged plays have aroused no interest. While the Noh depends upon the poetry inherent in its text, this poetry must be made to live on the stage through evocative and therefore essentially poetic expression.

While the Noh is a theatre of the elite both the Bunraku puppet and Kabuki theatres developed as amusements for the rising merchant class during the Tokugawa period (1600-1868). Banraku and Kabuki are closely linked and each has influenced the other. Indeed the repertoires of both overlap considerably. It should be no surprise, considering the coherence we have seen in Japanese art, that elements of the Noh can be found in these more popular genres. Some of the resemblances among all three are direct while others are implicit in the oppositional forces that are major elements in Japanese theatre in general.

Let us first examine the major contrasts that can be seen among Bunraku, Kabuki and Noh. If the Noh is a theatre of text and actor, realized through performance, Bunraku emphasizes the text, while Kabuki is truly an actor's theatre. Music, of course, is centrai to all three, and dance plays an important role in both Kabuki and Noh, but, for technical reasons alone is somewhat less emphasized in Bunraku.

The plot and action of both Kabuki and Bunraku plays are more accessible to the general audience than the highly abstract Noh plays. There are difficulties, however. The Japanese language has changed markedly in even the last one hundred years. The texts of these two formerly popular art forms are only partially comprehensible to modern audiences. In addition while stylization is somewhat less marked in Kabuki and Bunraku than in Noh it is by no means absent. The text is certainly no easier, and is probably more difficult, to understand than an opera text sung in one's own language in the West. If the Bunraku and Kabuki plots and action can be followed, like an opera can be, because they are well known, it is only the intellectual theatregoer who can really comprehend the entire text. This fact has contributed to the failing popularity of both dramatic forms in postwar Japan. A full understanding of the impact and mutual interrelations of these theatre forms as well as their links to the Noh depends, therefore, on an interpretation that places them in their original pre-modern context.

The Bunraku is built out of major contrasts between immediacy and distancing: between artificial reality and composed artificiality. In fact Bunraku can profitably be seen as a game that emphasizes these contrasts. Although Bunraku plays deal with real human experiences they draw their audience into the performance by creating a complex suspension of reality. This is the same overall mechanism that drives the Noh theatre, but in Bunraku a different set of techniques is employed. The Bunraku puppets are about one-third life size and are inventively articulated to move in surprisingly lifelike ways. Some Bunraku puppet heads have eyes that move and mouths that open and close although it must be noted that these are used sparingly. Even the fingers of the hands are fully jointed and each can be articulated separately. The very flexibility of these puppets, however, forces the Bunraku theatre to abandon achieved reality for artifice. These complex puppets can only be manipulated fully by three humans who are fully visible and, at times, literally surround the puppets. To avoid distraction, two assistant puppeteers are dressed in black robes and hoods. Yet the third puppeteer, the master, wears ceremonial dress and performs without a hood. The intended anonymity of operators is broken and the focus shifts, at least to some degree, from puppet to puppeteer.

The scripts of Bunraku plays are not spoken, rather they are intoned by a reader who sits with a group of samisen players to the right of the stage. Thus the "voices" of the puppets are clearly separated from their physical presence. The vocalization of the narrator is based on the technique of Buddhist chanting which takes the performance

back to sacred forms. Furthermore the narrator, the musicians and the chief puppeteer wear ceremonial dress. All of these factors contribute to the suspension of reality.

In contrast experts on Japanese theatre have pointed out that the Bunraku, because it involves puppets, allows for the depiction on stage of actions that might otherwise be repugnant to an audience, or impossible to perform. Thus the presence of a puppet rather than a human allows for greater realism. This possibility is exploited in various ways. During battle scenes heads literally fly off bodies, sexual activity is sometimes rather vividly presented, and magical transformations such as a change from human to animal form are accomplished with relative ease.

To guide interpretation a series of stereotyped but simple gestures and movements are employed. When, for example, asking a question, the puppet steps forward. A refusal is signaled by stepping backward. Fear is expressed by turning the head left and right. Yet these are only surface signs (known as *furi*) that function with the text to move the plot forward. Another set of symbolic gestures (the *kata*) also exists in the Bunraku and brings it somewhat closer to the ideas behind Noh drama. The *kata* are expressive gestures.

> *A psychologically true interpretation of each character is the chief goal of the operators, but they seek to embody in the performance not only the meaning of the words of the text but the moments of visual beauty they sense are implicit. This second requirement explains the use of the* kata, *spectacular poses which unlike the* furi, *may have no direct connection with the text, and may not be necessary even in the general portrayal of a character.*
>
> Donald Keene, ***Bunraku: The Art of the Japanese Puppet Theatre***

Of course even the *kata* are much more direct and active than would be permitted in the abstract and restrained Noh theatre. In fact *kata* are often used to express violent emotions that would be totally out of keeping in the Noh. Yet there are also reflections of understatement in the instructions to puppeteers. Scott lists the following:

1. *Excessive benevolence becomes weakness.*
2. *Excessive intelligence becomes cleverness.*
3. *Excessive faith becomes obstinacy.*
4. *Excessive honesty becomes awkwardness.*
5. *Excessive generosity becomes extravagance.*
6. *Excessive courtesy becomes adulation.*
7. *Excessive fortitude becomes arrogance.*
8. *There is a great difference between meanness and frugality.*
9. *Animal exuberance and courage are not the same.*

Just as the mask must come to life through the Noh actor who wears it, the Bunraku puppet must come to life through its chief operator. The training involved in producing these transformations is long and arduous in both theatre forms. The Noh actor gives himself to the mask and the Bunraku operator gives himself to the puppet. When the Noh actor puts on a mask backstage, he sits before a mirror in deep contemplation as he abandons his own personality and moves spiritually into the role.

There is one Noh performance in which a mask is put on and taken off in front of the audience. This is the Okina, a ceremonial dance, the meaning of which has been partially lost. All Noh plays are supposed to begin with a performance of Okina. One of the Okina characters is a black mask known as Sambaso. Sambaso symbolizes peace and prosperity. In the Bunraku theatre the green room for the puppeteers is connected to the stage by a staircase. A puppet called Sambaso is kept in a niche half way up this staircase. According to Scott, in former times the Sambaso puppet, which is manipu-

lated by only two operators, appeared on the stage about thirty minutes before the beginning of the performance. The Sambaso dance, which clearly has the same ritual function as Okina in the Noh theatre, lasted for only a few minutes, and was seen only by the earliest playgoers.

While it is clear that the Bunraku has been influenced by Noh, it is seen by Japanese scholars as a negation of the esthetic principles of Noh. Keene reminds us that the gestures of the Noh actor were so stylized that they could not be understood by the uninitiated. The Bunraku, on the other hand, maintains its realism and much of its impact through the clever imitation and exaggeration of emotional expression. "The Noh actor indicates that he is weeping by touching his sleeve to his forehead, but the Bunraku chanter may deliver instead a five minute crescendo of sobs and gasps."

Still in its own way the Bunraku overtly emphasizes artificiality through a series of intentional and technically required mechanisms. As a middle class art form Bunraku is more accessible than the Noh, but within the confines of this requirement is shares the overall form so characteristic of Noh. This form emphasizes fragmentation and artificiality along with an underlying reality, and a wide set of contrasts and oppositions. This truth was captured well by a reviewer for *Le Monde* (June 12th, 1974):

> *Depersonalized animators become the mechanisms that breathe a simulated and disincarnated life into these perfect reproductions of human beings. It is a strange sorcery, a super-Brechtian dream of distance and dissociation. All the elements of the spectacle are given simultaneously but are separated spatially. The eye sees them apart, but the observer is forced to reunify them. When a character in a play reaches for a cross, a hand gloved in black is superimposed over the delicate articulations of the minute fingers. Whose fingers are they? The manipulator and the puppet are confused in the same action. When a battle scene unfolds, it becomes a melee of black phantoms and puppets from which, it appears, come the cries and roars.*

What of Kabuki? It is the most realistic of Japan's traditional theatre forms. Sets are complex and detailed. A rotating stage and other mechanisms follow for spectacular scene changes. Rooftops fly off and trap doors open. Movement is broad with dance playing a major role in performance. Unlike the Noh, Kabuki music goes with the play and its actions. Dancers dance to the beat. Rhythm and tone imitate the message of the text and give it support. Modern and Western texts attempted in both Kabuki and Bunraku work best in Kabuki. At the National Theatre, at least, attempts are made to insert modern themes and contemporary humor into stock Kabuki plays. As an actor's theatre virtuosity is favored and *ad libs* are permitted. The toleration of departures from the text is extensive. A performance I saw in Tokyo at the National Theatre in 1977 included a broadly played gay samouri and a humorous dialog which touched on contemporary ecological problems in the context of traditional samouri ethics.

Kabuki theatre architecture is structured to reduce the distance created by the spatial arrangement of the Noh stage. The Noh stage has two sections both of which are under the roof that isolates audience from actors. These are the main performing space described above and the *hashi gakari* or bridge like extension that is connected to the green room and across which actors move slowly toward the main stage. In the Kabuki theatre the bridge has been converted into a side stage that cuts through the audience and which breaks the isolation of the proscenium. Spectacular entrances and exits are frequently played on this side stage which is specially lit for these occasions. This part of Kabuki performances is greatly appreciated by audiences. In fact there is a noticeable difference in the decorum and outward enthusiasm displayed at Kabuki and Bunraku

performances, on the one hand, and at the Noh theatre, on the other. Noh spectators sit quietly like audiences at chamber concerts in the West. Many are armed with texts of the performance even if some sleep through parts of the long plays. (It is not considered necessary to be attentive to the entire play and, in fact, knowing when to be attentive is a sign of connoisseurship.) There is never any overt expression of emotions until the end of the play, which is met with polite applause. Kabuki and Bunraku audiences move in and out of the hall. They often arrive late, sometimes to catch a favorite moment. Shouts of approval for well-acted scenes are common; there is applause in the middle of scenes, particularly at entrances and exits across the side stage. No one eats during a Noh performance, but at both Kabuki and Bunraku performances food is a major element in the event. Sweets, sushi, dried squid, and various drinks are sold in the lobby, and people carry food to their seats to eat during the play.

However, in spite of these conventions and the liberated spirit one sees in the Kabuki theatre strong links exist between it and Bunraku and between these and the Noh. These links are part of the Japanese esthetic system and add depth as well as evocative meaning to all performances. Again Kabuki has a looser structure that better serves the needs and customs of its bourgeois audience, but it has not lost the evocative power of cross reference to more classic forms. Kabuki, like other theatre in Japan, is based on the manipulation of distance and proximity, reality and artifice.

While the Bunraku strives for realism in the movement of its puppets, the Kabuki actor strives for puppet-like fidelity to stylistic movements. Kabuki actors literally imitate the Bunraku just as Bunraku has imitated Kabuki. This tension between the artificial and the real has already been seen in the Noh where the mask is made to live and the unadorned face is kept in mask-like rigidity. Within each genre the creation of mask and puppet, working always against the real, makes the lifelike into an artifice that is both real and not real at the same time. The Kabuki face, never masked, is mask-like in its heavy makeup. Strong emotions are expressed by the face behind the makeup, but they are emphasized in some characters through stylized face painting that increases the mask-like aspect of the face.

For historical reasons women, who may in fact have originated the Kabuki theatre, are not generally permitted to act in it today. This has led to the development of a favorite role type, the *onnagata,* or female impersonator. The *onnagata* attempts to portray the essence of femaleness rather than realistic female behavior. His femininity is built upon a careful stylization of proper female comportment. In the nineteenth century, however, the *onnagata* became the essence of womanhood for Japanese women. In those times women would attend Kabuki performances specifically to study the *onnagata* in order to perfect their imitation of his interpretation of feminine perfection. The real (in this case outside the theatre) copied the make-believe in order to become hyper-real.

The tensions and connections among the Noh, the Bunraku, and the Kabuki are based in part on the general esthetic of absence and contrast in Japanese art. In addition there is a constant interplay between what is there by what is not there. This results from strong traditional links that bind Japanese classical art into a coherent whole. There is also a persistent tension between the real and the make believe. Japanese theatre makes things alive through clever animation and while making the real artificial by imitating imitated life. In this sense Japanese theatre creates a reality of its own through both addition (piling artifice on artifice and developing a complex technology of imitation) and subtraction (by breaking and decomposing reality through a series of studied negations).

Alexander Alland, Jr. *is a professor of anthropology at Columbia University, currently doing fieldwork on The Performance Group's rehearsal process.* *Fieldwork for this article was supported by a grant from the John Simon Guggenheim Foundation.*

Playing With the Past:

Visitation and Illusion in the Mask Theatre of Bali

by John Emigh

What follows is a detailed account of a single performance of *topeng pajegan* performed by I Nyoman Kakul in the village of Tusan, Bali, on Feb. 6, 1975. *Topeng* is a popular form of masked theatre in Bali, and *topeng pajegan* an old and particularly demanding version of that form, in which one man portrays all of the characters—dancing, telling stories, making jokes, and performing rituals.

When we met in January 1975, Kakul checked a calendar, found it to be a particularly propitious hour to begin study, gave me my first lesson, and invited me to live in his

family compound for the next several months while I studied masked dance. In the months that followed, as I watched Kakul teach and perform, daily had him wrench my resistant body into something approximating the proper shapes for Balinese dance, and met with other performers and mask makers on the island, I came to understand *topeng* as a form that mediated between rituals of ancestral visitation I had recently seen in New Guinea and the theatre of character and illusion that I had studied in the West. I also grew to have a great respect and liking for the form itself and for the men who practice it.

Kakul had a stroke soon after I left Bali. He no longer performs. I hope that, along with its other purposes, this account will serve as a testament to his artistry.

Performance and Occasion:

The Clustering of Events

Topeng is usually performed as part of the festivities accompanying a wedding, a cremation, or an *odalan*—a yearly occasion when the gods come down to their appropriate temple shrines. Sometimes the performers will be drawn from the villagers themselves. At other times a specialist will be hired from outside the village. In February 1975 at Tusan Kakul was hired to perform *topeng pajegan* as a part of the ceremonies leading up to the cremation of a *brahmana* (high caste priest). Kakul himself is a *sudra* or *jaba*—born outside the caste system of privileged status. As usual, Kakul travelled to his work by public conveyance, his baskets of *topeng* masks and costumes competing for space with the chickens and goods that other passengers were bringing to market. As the bus approached Tusan, the road wound around a bend in the River Unda. On one side were green hills and a huge, gnarled banyon tree that marked the entrance to the village. On the other side, across the river, a vista of terraced rice fields stretched out toward the sea. A parade of villagers, dressed in brilliant reds and greens and yellows, with white cloths tied around their heads; came flooding out onto the road from the village. The cremation itself would not be held for three days, but already much of the village life was given over to the activities surrounding this event; the sense of holiday contrasted sharply with the mundane world of the bus and its passengers. Many of the villagers were carrying brightly colored gilded umbrellas. Others were striking small gongs of different sizes to create a joyful interplay of pitches and rhythms. Rice cake offerings of pink and yellow and white were piled high on silver trays perched on the heads of several of the women. As the bus stopped, Kakul opened his eyes and reached for a basket of masks.

By the time the baskets of masks and costumes had been carried to a central courtyard, the procession was returning. The rice offerings were set down. Kakul was greeted as visitor, guest, and hired expert. The manner of greeting was determined by caste and conditioned by his reknown as an entertainer. A group of priests sat in a pavilion—laughing, trading stories, chewing beetle nut. They greeted Kakul with enthusiasm and he returned their greetings, maintaining the extreme attitude of respectfulness that befits a *jaba* in the company of *brahmana* priests. This behavior was in marked contrast to the demeanor he exhibited a short time later apart from the priests, at a huge feast of turtle meat and hotly spiced rice. Here Kakul was animated and filled with expressive energy—an extraordinary storyteller set down among friends.

Before the feast had finished, perhaps a hundred village men poured into the center of the village in answer to the sound of beaten wooden gongs, or *kulkuls*, and took up a huge structure of thick, crossed bamboo trunks that supported an enormous, larger-than-life image of a white cow, decked with gilded embellishments. This figure would become the burning sarcophagus of the deceased *brahmana* in the cremation to come. A strident and boisterous gong ensemble formed and the cow was borne aloft by the villagers. The entire structure was spun about in the main square and then carried at

Kakul tells an anecdote at the feast preceding the performance at Tusan.

a breakneck pace down the dirt road, accompanied by gongs and a cacaphony of shouts and laughter.

This clustering of activities is typical of the occasions when *topeng* is performed. Processions, feasting, beating of gongs, shouts and laughter are deliberately overlapped creating an event of great density. While the particular events were appropriate for a cremation, a similar overlapping would precede a wedding or *odalan*.

A Balinese Actor Prepares

As the villagers returned up the road, sweating under the burden of the white cow, Kakul moved to a relatively isolated area and began preparations for his performance. An offering had been prepared for his use. Standing over the offering, he spoke formulaic mantras in Javanized Sanskrit, invoking earth, air, heavenly ether, and the nine manifestations of the Hindu godhead to bless his actions as performer. He did not make any effort to hide this ritual of preparation; neither did he make any effort to display it. The mantras were spoken quietly, in plain view, away from the main areas of activity. While the mantras concentrated Kakul's energies on the performance to come, the use of Sanskrit placed him in touch with a traditional path of access to a divine world. In employing the language of the *brahmana* priests, Kakul stepped out of the vernacular and, in so doing, stepped outside of the caste-based linguistic conventions that would define him as a *sudra* in the social structuring of Balinese life. By using the language of the priests and of the distant past, he began to assume the position of a mediator between history and contemporary realities—a role in which the day-to-day social obligations and caste-based rules of etiquette could be suspended.

Following the speaking of these mantras, Kakul headed for the performance area. A curtain had been set up in a large courtyard, and a temporary structure of woven mats was set behind the curtain to provide a changing room. There, behind the curtain, Kakul changed into his *topeng* costume with help from an assistant. This is an elaborate procedure. The *topeng* performer wears only one costume for all of the characters that he portrays; only the masks and headdresses change. Composed of many layers, the costume is hot, uncomfortable, and spectacular. Over white pants and a flowing white cloth that falls between the legs, a brilliant assortment of bands, cloaks, and tabards are arrayed. The green, red, blue, purple, and black expanses of material are all embellished with gold ornamentation, while fringe drips from the tabards and glittering sequins dot leggings, wristlets and collars. At last, a ceremonial sword, or *keris*, is wrenched into position, its handle poised over the dancer's right shoulder and its sheathed blade forcing the whole costume to billow out to the left.

This costume is unlike the ordinary dress of the Balinese. Although *topeng* stories are drawn from chronicles detailing ancient wars and the dance vocabulary has its roots in the martial arts of the Indonesian archipelago, the relationship of the costume to the court or military dress of the 14th and 15th Centuries is obscure. The costume is designed to evoke and exalt that period, not duplicate it. It belongs to the marginal performance time between the past and the future.

His costume in place, Kakul then turned to the unopened basket of masks and spoke the following words:

> *Om, honored grandfather,*
> *Om, honored grandmother,*
> *Please wake up in order to dance.*

He knocked on the basket three times, then opened the basket and arrayed the masks in the order they would be used. After the performance, upon closing the basket, he would speak to the masks once more, give them an offering, again call them "honored grandfather" and "honored grandmother," and bid them return to their "heavenly homes." Using a flower, Kakul sprinkled "holy water" onto the masks and onto his own face. He then held a burning stick of sandalwood incense up to the nostrils of the masks, breathed in the incense himself, and spoke further mantras in Javanized Sanskrit, asking divine blessing for his performance. The flower is emblematic of Siwa, the water of Visnu, and the burning incense of Brahma. The holding of the incense up to the masks is strikingly similar to the "smoking" of a trance dancer.

There is a long and still vital tradition of trancing and spirit visitation evident in Balinese theatre and life. In deep trance, untutored spirit mediums are said to speak in ancestral languages and transformed voices, prescribing ways to propitiate neglected spiritual entities. Pre-adolescent girls in trance, *sanghyang dedari*, perform dances they have never rehearsed, in unison, their eyes closed. In the small village of Trunyan, a pre-

The parading of the priest's sarcophagus at Tusan.

Hindu enclave in Bali, a set of masks may be found bearing a remarkable similarity to ancestral *tubuan* masks of New Guinea, complete with a costume made of padandus leaf hoops. As in the New Guinea dances of ancestral visitation, the *berutuk* mask seems to function as a conduit for visiting spirits. The existence of the *berutuk* ceremonies may point to a Papuan underlay in Balinese culture. Both the *sanghyang dedari* dances and the *berutuk* ceremonies can be traced to pre-Hindu practices, antedating the influence of the Javanese courts on Balinese life and theatre. But the Bali Hindu religion has embraced this tradition of visitation.

At the *odalan* ceremonies that often provide the occasion for *topeng* performances, gods and ancestral spirits are called down to visit their shrines, thus activating a temple. Called forth by the same sandalwood incense used to "smoke" trance dancers and mediums and to prepare the *topeng pajegan* dancer and his masks, these ancestral spirits are also depicted as leaving from their "holy mountain," Gunung Agung, the volcano that dominates the Balinese horizon—providing a fixed point for the Balinese sense of direction as well as a home for both the Hindu deities and the ancestral host from Majapahit. Majapahit was a feudal Hindu empire of East Java from the 12th to the 15th Centuries. Most Balinese trace their ancestry from Majapahit—its chronicles are very important in the *topeng* repertory. The entrance of the *topeng* dancer is always made from the direction of Gunung Agung, and it is here that the *topeng* masks may be thought to have a "heavenly home." The brilliant-colored "fiery raiments" of the ancestral host, along with their sportiveness and love of display, remind one of nothing else in Bali so much as the *topeng* performer. Indeed, the Balinese word for an actor's "presence" is "*taksu*"—the same word used for the ancestral spirits. *Topeng* draws from the tradition of visitation—but in *topeng* the tradition is theatricalized. The *topeng* dancer does not show any evidence of performing in trance.

Kakul prepares to perform at Tusan.

The *topeng* actor seeks inspiration not possession. But his approach to characterization through the mask is informed and supported by the tradition of visitation. Occasionally, when I would bring a new mask home, Kakul would take hold of it with his right hand, supporting it on his palm from behind so that it was fully visible to him. He would turn it first one way, then another, and make it look up and down. He would play with the movement, adjusting the speed and the sharpness of definition, until he was satisfied that he had found how the mask moved best; how *it* wanted to move. Only then would he put it on his face and begin to move his body bringing the mask to life, making an amalgam of mask and movement that, for lack of a better word, can be called character. Always, his words would be about the demands of the mask. When he liked a mask, he would say, "This one lives." When he didn't like a mask, he would disparage it as having no life in it. This method of seeking out the will of the mask is typical of *topeng* performers.

Unlike the *sanghyang dedari* dancer, the *topeng* performer first learns dances by rote, his body being pushed and pulled into the proper shapes by his guru. Bit by bit, by imitation and by direct manipulation of his limbs, he assimilates the dance vocabulary he will need to perform a range of masked characters. The masks themselves are not used at all at this stage of the training. Yet, to my surprise, when I was studying with Kakul, he would repeatedly criticize my facial expressions as I grimaced while awkwardly trying to make my feet, arms, and body work together in excruciatingly unfamiliar ways. The mask was not a disguise. If the face of the actor behind the mask did not register the character of the figure dancing, the body would move wrong, and the mask would be denied its "life."

After I left Bali, W. S. Rendra, the Javanese poet, playwright, and director, told me of the way his grandfather prepared to perform with a new mask. I don't know if this exact procedure has been followed in Bali, but the procedure Rendra describes is entirely in keeping with what I know about attitudes towards masks in Bali. When Rendra's grandfather acquired a new mask, he, like Kakul, would take it in his hand and turn it this way and that, trying to sense the spirit suggested by the mask—its life. He then placed the mask on his bed, by his head. As he slept, he purposefully interjected the imagined spirit of the mask into his dreams. In these controlled dreams, Rendra's grandfather asked the spirit of the mask to appear as a witness to important events drawn from his waking life. Working backwards in time, he finally dreamt his own birth. In that dream, the embodied spirit of the mask took the "brother" placenta in his hands. After this dream, the dancer was considered able to let the spirit of the mask enter his body; and, through his body, the life of the mask was able to find expression, animating dance movements previously learned by rote. The dancer was not possessed; but his behavior was transformed.

Introductory Dances: The Shaking of the Curtain and the Entrance of the Ancestor

As Kakul arranges his masks in the order they will be used, the *gamelan* orchestra begins to play. Brightly, quickly, gaily, wooden hammers fall on the bronze keys of the metallaphones with perfect and seemingly effortless precision, forming intricate interlocking patterns that are embellished by the striking of several small bronze pots and the playing of sweet-voiced flutes, marked by the regular sounding of a large gong, and urged on by the rapid play of drums. Attracted by the music, the audience has begun to arrange itself in a large oval in the courtyard. The orchestra is at one of the small ends of this oval; the decorated curtain that hides Kakul's preparations is at the other. At either side of the curtain, gilded ceremonial umbrellas have been stuck in to the ground. There

is no other "scenery," no further isolation of the dancing space from the space outlined by the audience.

Children gather first, sitting cross-legged or stretching out on the ground, their faces bright and expectant. The performance had been "scheduled" to begin at four o'clock. It is now seven o'clock and pressure lamps are being stoked and hung overhead to provide illumination as the daylight dwindles. No one seems to mind. Things happen as they are ready on ceremonial occasions, or when the time is propitious. Clock time is regarded as a relatively unimportant convention on these occasions and has little to do with when things begin or end. Gradually, adults begin to fill in behind the children, forming several more or less attentive "rows" of people sitting cross-legged, squatting, and standing, while others look casually on from a distance. Casual banter blends with the music.

Behind the curtain, arrayed in his colorful and gilded assortment of tabards and cloaks, his *keris* handle poised over his right shoulder and his costume billowing out behind him, Kakul makes a final check of the masks to be used—an extraordinary assortment of kings, beasts, heroes, rogues, and buffoons. He takes the smiling, red mask of a proud *patih* (prime minister), I Gusti Ngurah Lepang, in his hand, regards it for a second, then sets it in place. A partial wig is slipped on so that the black hair falls to Kakul's shoulders and an elaborately carved and gilded leather headdress, studded with flowers and sticks of burning incense, is placed over what remains of Kakul's grey hair. Leaves are fixed along the sides of the mask, blurring the dividing lines between mask and face. Kakul sets himself in position for his entrance. A guttural sound emerges from his throat. One hand gives a quick shake to the curtain, while the other makes last-minute adjustments. Signalled by the lead drummer, the *gamelan* starts to play the eight beat, cyclical melody of *baris gilak*, traditionally associated with the dancing of warriors. Kakul shakes the curtain harder. A rush of sound from a set of overlapped small cymbals attends its movement. Again the curtain shakes, more violently this time; again, the shaking of the curtain is accompanied by a rush of percussive sound, bringing to mind the auspicious shaking of the world that accompanies the coming of the ancestral host in invocatory songs used in temple ceremonies.

Kakul parts the curtain in the middle and, as the red-faced *patih*, enters into the space defined by the expectant audience. His head makes small, sharp and sudden movements. His legs are bent, the feet set wide apart and firmly planted on the earth in a position derived from martial arts. The fingers move quickly in multiples of the musical pulse, as though they are antennae testing the air of an unfamiliar world. The warrior alertly scans the new space, his hands elegantly moving up to the gilded lacework helmet as he glances about him. Ominously, perhaps suspiciously, with a sense of great strength and consummate control, he moves forward. The walk is extremely "unnatural." The body seems coiled and tense. The feet pivot out on each step, maintaining balance and readiness. The hands sculpt the air in graceful, smooth lines. Suddenly, the *patih* focuses his attention on a ceremonial umbrella. With a quick cross-step, he moves towards the umbrella and raises up on one foot, remaining poised in the air as the orchestra dramatically halts for two beats. Kakul seems to be immense. The music resumes and Kakul lifts his gilded cloak in a display of grandeur and pride. He walks more quickly now, claiming the oval as his own, dominating the space, his rapid moving fingers still testing the air. Occasionally, he will suddenly shift focus and react to an unseen enemy. Or is he reacting to the presence of the audience?

Kakul has never danced with this orchestra before. Still the cymbals and drums seem to extend the movement of his body into sound, creating an experience of synesthesia in which sound and movement are one. A small, flashing movement of a knee or elbow signals Kakul's intentions to the lead drummer and the drummer signals the rest of the orchestra in turn by a rhythmic code. As Kakul suddenly pivots full around and stops in a pose of arrested motion, the full *gamelan* once more stops with him. Eventually, the space claimed, the display completed, the proud *patih* disappears through the split curtain and it closes behind him.

Kakul enters as Patih Lepang, the first of the introductory characters.

Kakul as Penasar Keilhan.

I Made Regug, Kakul's current mask maker, performs as Penasar Keilhan in a company topeng performance.

Behind the curtain, Kakul takes off the mask and headdress of the *patih* and takes up another mask. This mask is tinged an odd greenish-blue and features plump cheeks and a mischievous grin. It has a distinctly comic cast and belongs to Pasung Grisgris, a *patih* who once in 14th Century Bali grafted a pig's head onto his King's body. The new mask in place and another headdress set above it, Kakul draws up a chair to the curtain, takes the folds that form the opening in his hand, and gives them a shake. Again, the cymbals and drums accompany this motion with a rush of sound. The *gamelan* is playing another variation of *baris gilak*, the warrior's tune. After teasing the audience by playing with the curtain, Kakul throws it open and reveals the mischievous *patih* perched on top of the chair.

The gestures that he makes now are quite different in effect from those of the proud red-faced *patih*. Rather than dominating the space with the alertness of a threatened warrior, he plays with the dynamics of the performance situation, openly toying with the drummer, daring him to follow his rapid gestures, teasing the musicians and the audience, and occasionally even punctuating the *gamelan's* music with a scaborous gesture. The dance follows the general outlines of the previous display, embellishing the same basic dance vocabulary; but the tone is lighter, more playful, with a touch of parody. The audience responds to the playful antics of Pasung Grisgris with howls of delighted laughter. His antics completed, Pasung Grisgris, too, returns to the unseen world behind the curtain that opens, lets him through, and swallows him up again.

The *gamelan* changes melodies. This time the sound is gentler, not so insistent, or manic, or forceful; there is an almost seamless 32-beat cycle marked by two gong strokes. Kakul takes up the mask of an old man and regards it for a moment. This is the only one of his masks that he himself carved. He fixes the mask on his face and sets a flowing mane of white hair upon his head. The character is I Gusti Dauh Bale Agung, aged minister of the Royal Court of Gelgel in 15th Century Bali. The curtain shaking is again repeated, as it will be for each new character. This time, though, the shaking is less vigorous and Kakul parts the curtain to reveal himself as an old man sitting on a chair, surveying a new space, taking in the audience, hearing the music, adjusting his costume, and gathering energy for his dance. First one hand, then the other begins tentatively to move to the gentle music. Gradually, energy and confidence seem to return to the aged courtier and he takes a standing position. After further adjustments, the sight of the ceremonial umbrellas seem to awaken a sense of pride in battles waged long ago and lodged in an old warrior's memory of his past.

The old man begins to dance, slowly at first, then faster and faster. The music keeps pace and grows louder as the aged dancer grows more and more energetic, finally overextending himself, carried away in his proud enthusiasm. A series of rapid turns leaves him off-balance and he stumbles toward the audience, barely managing to stop himself from falling into its midst. The audience roars with laughter. Slowly, the ancient courtier collects himself, breathing slowly. He reaches out to shake the hand of a small child who is looking up at him with an enraptured smile. He seems about to resume his dancing, but instead reaches suddenly up to his flowing mane of hair and grabs hold of an imaginary head louse. He looks at it and the audience laughs. He pinches the imaginary pest and tosses it in the direction of the delighted audience. Twice more, he hears the music playing and starts to resume his dance. Each time, he reaches instead for lice—once on his leg, another time on the back of his neck. Finally, he shakes off these distractions and begins to dance. He is more careful this time and there are no more stunning turns, but he manages to recapture a sense of human dignity and authority before exiting through the curtain. The obligatory set of introductory dances, or *pengelembar,* is over. No words have been spoken and none of the characters portrayed will reappear. But a world has been introduced, and a range of human response demonstrated. Perhaps a third of the performance time has elapsed.

Accompanied by an elaborate interplay of movement and sound, the *pengelembar* characters enter through the curtain from the sacred direction of Gunung Agung and return in that direction after their dances are over. Behind the curtain lies the abode of

the gods and the ancestors. In front of the curtain is a neutral space created from unadorned Balinese earth and demarcated by a ring of spectators. As Kakul enters from the direction of the ancestors as the proud *patih,* I Gusti Ngurah Lepang, his brilliant costume, his mastery of a special vocabulary of movement, and his concentrated energy set him apart. The audience regards him as extraordinary, but the hypersensitive, abrupt, and prideful display of the *patih* may indicate that the world of the audience is as challenging to him as his world is to them. A distance is established between a character emerging from a world dominated by the ways of the past and the audience living and watching in the present. The actor moves as a character from the world of the past into the world of the present in a sort of foray across boundaries of time and association.

The pattern is that of a rite of visitation, but the playing out of this pattern has been theatricalized. The audience knows that behind the curtain lies not only a sacred

Kakul as Dalem Waturenggong.

mountain where gods and ancestors dwell, but Kakul's basket of masks and changing table. Kakul himself is not a man entranced or possessed, but a performer in triumphant control of his actions, choosing to portray first one character, then another, adjusting his costume, signalling an unfamiliar orchestra his intentions as a dancer, determining the dynamics of the performance.

The first dance uses the esthetics of ancestral visitation to establish a division between the world of the past and the present. The next dance plays with that sense of division. Pasung Grisgris's teasing and playing with the orchestra and audience is as direct and immediate as it is mischievous. As the boundaries between worlds are violated, laughter occurs. The third character presented in the *pengelembar*, I Gusti Dauh Bale Agung, is far more "human" than either of his predecessors. He makes further excursions across the boundaries separating the storied world of the past and the mundane world of the present. When the old man reaches out and touches a child in the audience, he is engaging in a form of contact that would be unthinkable for either the proud *patih* or his antic opposite. The order of appearance of these characters is not arbitrary. While the number of *pengelembar* characters varies from performance to performance and the choice of middle characters is up to the discretion of the dancers, a proud *patih* invariably comes first and a somewhat eccentric old man invariably enters last. By playing with the theatrical possibilities inherent in the representation of visitation, a framework for performance is established that will allow for a playing back and forth between the world as it is imagined to have been and the world as it is known to be.

Storytelling: The Languages of Topeng

Topeng is not only a dance theatre; it is also a storytelling theatre, rich in verbal interplay. The introductory dances stake out the means of playing back and forth between the distant past and the immediate present through modulation of the degree of artifice used, through control of the directness of contact with the audience, and, most importantly, through the use of humor. This play between the past and the present, the distant and the immediate, the grand and the mundane is at the heart of *topeng*.

The stories of *topeng* are drawn from the *babad dalem* or *Chronicles of the Kings*. These chronicles are not contained in one central and authoritative collection. They are the work of numerous court poets, *brahmanas* employed to glorify the ancestral heritage of their various *ksatriya* lords—drawing from inscriptions on copper plates (*persasti*) and from oral tradition. Beginning in the 16th Century and continuing into the early years of this century, these court poets wrote out their semi-historical chronicles on sheets of dried and boiled palm leaves, known as *lontars*. The quasi-historical works that were produced by this process tell stories pertaining to the royal courts of the Majapahit Empire. They report the coming of the Majapahit expeditionary force to Bali in the 14th Century, and relate incidents centered around the often warring Hindu princedoms that were established in Bali during the years that followed. The story used by Kakul in Tusan relates to an invasion of Blambangan, Java by an expeditionary force sent in approximately 1500 by Dalem Waturenggong, who ruled the Balinese Kingdom of Gelgel, now located in the province of Klungkung.

Kakul's immediate source is contained in a small notebook of stories, drawn from the *lontars*, that he often refers to while choosing and preparing a performance. As with many of the *babad* stories, variants exist, stressing the roles of different historical figures. Kakul thus has a wide range of interpretations available to him and he can shape the stories in any one of a number of ways. He does not quote from the *babad*. Instead he creates various storytelling *personae* and, through them, improvises on the *babad* story line.

The first such storyteller to enter is the Penasar Kelihan. His entrance, accompanied by the usual shaking of the curtain and flourishes of cymbals and drums, reveals

him to be proud, flamboyant, and commanding. He has the hearty laugh of an enthusiast and dances in an exaggeratedly macho fashion that pushes the dance to the edge of parody. The mask of the Penasar Kelihan covers the face only as far as the upper lip, leaving the jaw free to move. Huge, wide eyes bug out of the purple mask and impart a look of perpetual exaggeration.

After performing for approximately half an hour, Kakul now speaks for the first time. The words that he utters are half sung, half chanted in Middle Javanese, a literary language used by poets in Bali from the 17th to the 19th Centuries in composing *kidung*—romantic epics set in Majapahit to be sung in groups or used in the courtly *gambuh* drama. The particular words used begin the *kidung tantri,* a Javanese version of the *Tale of A Thousand and One Nights:* "A story is told of the King of Patali, rich, proud, and full of dignity." The use of the ancestral language is more important than the content of the words used here. Indeed, the words are unintelligible to the vast majority of people in the audience. Most audience members would simply identify the language and style of singing as *ucapan gambuh,* speech of the courtly *gambuh* theatre. The audience would also be cognizant of the theatrical associations of this mode of speech with the Majapahit Empire.

After playing with the *gamelan,* with the audience, and with his own sense of presence—combining the *topeng* dance vocabulary already defined as belonging to the world of the past with exclamations and hearty laughter that place him in a most immediate present—the Penasar Kelihan stops short and speaks in yet another ancestral language, Old Javanese, or Kawi. The mode of delivery is guttural, authoritative, chanted. The themes and characters associated with this mode of delivery originate in the Indian epic tradition, notably in the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata.* From 900 to 1500 these epics were translated and reworked in the Hindu courts of Java, becoming Javanized in the process. Kawi began to appear as the language of Balinese courts as early as 994 and passages from the Javanized epics still serve as sources of ancestral wisdom.

The first words that the entire audience can comprehend are immediate and personal: The Penasar Kelihan is happy to be here, strutting, dancing, and telling tales. He is especially happy, he says, because he has just become a bachelor again—inviting the audience to laugh at the age-old joke with his own infectious laughter. Once again, the mode of address is more important than the information being given. The use of colloquial Balinese recontextualizes the present in the potential space thus far dominated by the languages of the past. The encouragement to laughter grants the audience permission to participate playfully, if vicariously, in the leaps from past to present and back again, licensed by the occasion of performance.

This is a mode of play that a Balinese audience is particularly well prepared for by skills in communication necessary for their daily lives. I have referred to the Penasar Kelihan as speaking "colloquial Balinese." In fact, the nature of "Balinese" is far more complex than this would indicate. Writing in the 1930's, Miguel de Covarrubias in *Island of Bali* described language practices as follows:

> *When two strange Balinese meet, as for instance on the road, they call each other* djero, *a safe, polite way of addressing someone whose title is unknown. Since there are no outward signs of caste. . . strangers talk in the middle language, a compromise between daily speech and the polite tongue. Should, however, one be of low caste and the other a nobleman, it would be wrong for them to continue talking in this manner, and one of the two, probably the high-caste man, will ask the other: "Antuk linggih?" Where is your place (caste)?" which is answered by the other man's stating his caste. Then, the usual system is adopted; the low man speaks the high tongue and the aristocrat answers in the common language. . . two distinct, unrelated languages with separate roots, different words, and extremely dissimilar character. It was always incongruous to hear an educated nobleman talking the harsh, guttural tongue, while an ordinary peasant had to address him in the refined high Balinese.*

Even with the tendency in Bali today to use the status-marking modes of language less, it is still an insult to be termed *"sing nawang basa"* or one who doesn't know the language. The Balinese are very sensitive to relationships among context, speech, and action. The theatre plays with this consciousness, both reinforcing the sense that different words and actions properly belong to different contexts and delighting in the leaps from context to context provided by an expert performer.

As Penasar Kelihan, Kakul abruptly shifts to the respectful vocabulary and mode of address appropriate to High Balinese in order to address humbly his Lord and King, Dalem Waturenggong, and to pay homage to the Hindu deities and consecrated ancestors. For the first time, he places himself as a character within a world of illusion with interconnected social relationships and the capacity to sustain a "plot." At first, this world of illusion is referred to as "here in ancient Bali," it is then particularized as being "here in Gelgel," invoking the nearby ancient capitol. The Penasar Kelihan identifies himself as a servant to Dalem Waturenggong, thereby specifying the time of the story as being approximately 1500.

This world of illusion, though, is abruptly shattered almost as soon as it is stated. After a vigorous bit of dancing and a mischievous *kekawin* refrain from the *Ramayana* describing the young monkey Angeda rising high on his tail in order to insult the demon King Rawana, Kakul momentarily drops the story and even the character of the Penasar Kelihan altogether and speaks of a "here" that is definitely Tusan at the present moment of performance. His use of the "crude" low Balinese is made even more immediate by deployment of the local Klungkung dialect as he chides the *ksatriya*-led *gamelan* for rushing during the dance and makes fun of himself as a mangy "old dog." The contrast between the behavior of the new *persona* and the humble pleadings of the Penasar Kelihan as he tries to avoid his King's curses could not be greater.

So far, the audience only knows the historical time and locale of the story to be told; yet, Kakul has deployed Middle Javanese, Old Javanese, and high, low and medium Balinese and has given to each its own sense of decorum, its own mode of being. Before the performance is over, he will also deploy Modern Indonesian and Archipelago Sanskrit. What A.L. Becker noted about *Wayang* is true also of *Topeng:* it includes within it, in each performance, the entire history of the literary language. *Topeng's* "content" can be seen as the presentation and contextualizing of the languages of the past and present.

These various linguistic worlds established one by one and the process of contextual leaps set in motion, Kakul, as Penasar Kelihan, begins to concentrate on the story itself, providing expository information, freely dropping into crude dialect for immediacy and humor, soaring into recitations from the *Mahabharata* in Kawi to invoke an ancient warrior's *ethos,* and singing sections from the *kidung malat* in Middle Javanese to invoke images of courtly grace and elegance. As Kakul leaps from frame to frame, he assumes three essential roles while still wearing the mask of Penasar Kelihan: he is servant in an illusionary world of ancient Gelgel, the proud reciter of epic poetry, and the mangy "old dog" of a performer. Alternating among these, Kakul manipulates the flexible vehicle chosen from the *babad* stories recorded in his notebook. As Penasar Kelihan, he quotes Kings and Ministers as the story unfolds, ever sensitive to their bearing and manner as language shifts appropriately in the caste-conscious world of ancient Gelgel.

Another Storyteller: Common Sense and Extraordinary Happenings

For all the textual and contextual leaps, the world of "ancient Bali" invoked by the Penasar Kelihan is coherent in its formulation and rigorous in its demands. The singing of the *kidung* selections in Middle Javanese evokes an image of elegance and courtly

grace consciously derived from the Courts of Majapahit: As the King is about to enter, "the air is transformed. It is all gentleness and prettiness." The recitations in *Kawi* of lines from the Javanese *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* give a sense of divine purpose to the power and elegance of the Court. In this world, every man has his place in a hierarchical chain. The King humbles himself before the gods and holds his dignity among men inviolate. Warriors pledge their lives to their Kings and command the service of their men. Thus, the Penasar Kelihan, though low on the chain, humbles himself before his King and commands his lackeys without ceremony to "Pack up! Get ready for a fight!" "A small ring is a bracelet for the finder," sings the Penasar Kelihan. By extension, the implication is that the King is a God on earth. This sense of form repeating form is given its most elaborate expression by Jelantik, the eventual hero of the story, when he likens the "macrocosmos" of the spiritual world to the "microcosmos" of the physical world and states that "the microcosmos finds expression in the body of every man."

The world of ancient Bali as presented by the Penasar Kelihan is one that needs vigilant defense. He recites from the *Mahabharata* that "since time immemorial, the warrior's path has been one of action." In this story, the order of the world is in jeopardy, because of the disfigurement of an image of the King. While such shocks to the world's ordering demand redress and give rise to drama, they also open the way to humor. The Penasar Kelihan himself, though, cannot truly exploit the humor latent in the instability of such a world. With his love of epic verse, his exaggerated dance posture, and his hearty, enthusiast's laugh, he is quintessentially advocate and advertiser for the ethos and splendor of "ancient Bali." But this Penasar does not tell this story alone. He alternates storytelling functions with the Penasar Cenikan, or younger storyteller.

In *topeng panca*, the company form of *topeng*, these characters work in pairs and are understood to be "brothers." They are invariably in the service of the Kings, heroes,

Kakul as Penasar Cenikan.

Kakul as Patih Jelantik Made Tengahan.

and adversaries whose deeds the chronicles relate. They are also, most importantly, mediating characters between the heroic world of the past and the mundane world of the present. Coming from the past into the world of the present, these characters may talk about anything from esoteric Hindu mythology to birth control programs or tourists falling off motorcycles while they provide exposition for the "plot." More often than not, their talk is humorous and their characters are designed to maximize the use of humor as they assume their roles as mediators.

As with any good comedy team, the "brothers" have contrasting styles. The Penasar Kelihan is the straight man, full of self-importance and bound to the world of the past by word and gesture. The Penasar Cenikan, on the other hand, has the freedom from constraints of a comic innocent. He walks upright, arms by his sides, in a casual manner that violates all of the carefully established decorum of the legendary world. His speech is almost always in contemporary Balinese. When he does sing a *kidung* selection or quote *kekawin* poetry, the result is often parody. In his light, nasal voice, he often makes light of the pretentiousness of his older sibling. Like his brother, he wears a half mask; but his is of a far more "natural" appearance, the performer's own mischievous eyes showing through the empty eye sockets. Unlike his brother, he has a proper name, a very common and undistinguished one: I Ketut Rai.

In Kakul's *topeng* there is a marked difference in tone as the Penasar Cenikan takes over the storytelling. As in the introductory dances, the tendency is toward the human and the contemporary. Speaking almost entirely in Balinese after a self-deprecating passage from the *kidung malat,* the Penasar Cenikan does not mock the heroic values espoused by the Penasar Kelihan—he speaks as an outsider to the heroic world that supports those values. His speech is full of expletives revealing an attitude of wonderment toward the events he must relate: "Pih!" "Beh!" "Aduh!" The idea of becoming a great warrior himself amuses and pleases him, but the assumption of the role of "Ketut Rai the Invincible" is not convincing and it is with a sense of surprise at his own words that he recounts his noble reply to his Lord's suggestion that he stay at home with his wife rather than go off to war—a report that draws the audience's laughter as well.

And yet, this simple man of common sense must report the most extraordinary happening of the story: the appearance of Jelantik's accursed father in the form of a giant leech who can be restored only by his son's death on the field of battle. The Penasar Cenikan does not pretend to understand the workings of such curses as they fall upon those who disturb the fixed order of the world. He can only relate what he saw and heard, improbable though it might be. He tells the audience that the leech was hairy. He compares it in size and shape to familiar objects of the day-to-day world: a roofing mat, a beetle nut cannister. He interjects mundane details concerning a fishing pole and bait. He is an unlikely chronicler of extraordinary events.

Rather than disguise the distance between the fantastic world of the ancestral heroes and the mundane world of the ordinary man, his wondering presence emphasized that gap; but, as he plays across that gap, the telling of the story becomes more recognizably human. With his addition as human witness, the past contains something more of the present and the audience's own response to such fantastic happenings finds expression. By alternating the Penasar Cenikan's wonderment in the face of the extraordinary events that he has witnessed and must describe with the Penasar Kelihan's boldly assertive reactivation of the languages and attitudes of the ancestral past, the audience is afforded contrasting ways of approaching the stories that define their history as a people.

The Dancing of the Principals

During Kakul's performance, each of the principal characters within the story is accorded a dance. Framed by the alternating voices of the two Penasars, King, hero, and antagonist, all make their separate appearances. The King is first and the manner of his invocation is interesting. As Dalem Waturenggong, King of Gelgel, is called into the playing space by the Penasar Kelihan, the rate of change from language to language undergoes a rapid acceleration: kawi, Middle Javanese, and Balinese follow each other in rapid succession as if all times are dramatically merging into one in order to accommodate the King's entrance. An interplay is established between expectations appropriate to the rival esthetic modes of dramatic illusion and ancestral visitation. The King's entrance is embedded in an unfolding story and is partially anticipated in the terms of dramatic illusion. He is bidden to come forth among his ministers and his people, asked to enter the "hall of justice" in "ancient Bali." He is quoted as preparing his loyal followers for his entrance, establishing protocol among imagined ministers gathering in an illusionary world. The King is arriving on business. Yet the Penasar Kelihan also sings of his imminent entrance through the curtain in terms of performance and display. He tells the audience that the King will come forth "dancing beautifully." The use of ancestral languages, the deployment of music, the shaking of the curtain, the lack of illusionistic scenery, the placement of the curtain itself, and the promised emphasis on display all combine to relate the King's entrance to the traditions of ancestral visitation already theatricalized in the introductory dances.

A similar shuffling back and forth between these rival esthetic modes is evident in the other two appearances of principal characters embedded within the telling of the story. As the Penasar Cenikan calls upon his master Jelantik, he urges him to "come forth" and "reveal" himself, employing terms of visitation, performance, and display. The Hero's imminent appearance is also talked of as "going forth," as a departure for Blambangan—the next stop along the line in a developing dramatic "plot." The audience is asked to regard Jelantik's entrance and dance both as an act of revelation, a coming forth into their world, and as an event within the dramatic line of action, a going forth to another illusionary locale.

As the King of Blambangan shakes the curtain, thereby cueing a frenzied rush of percussive sound, he cries out in kawi, "Behold, here I come, the King of Blambangan," and warns the audience that preparation is necessary to witness his powerful countenance. The curtain is yanked open and the King thrusts his animalistic hands forward, looking through the opened curtain into the performance oval, demanding to know whom it is he is facing. Is he talking to the warriors from Gelgel who have invaded his territory? Or is he speaking to the audience he sees revealed to him on the other side of the curtain, demanding information from them in a language which is no longer theirs? The ambiguity is deliberate. By shifting back and forth between the modes of illusion and visitation, the performer can playfully toy with the vantage point of the audience. The display format of the introductory dances is now loosely embedded within a developing line of action or "plot" and the result is a theatrical form rich in its ability to awaken wonder while it mediates between the world as the audience ordinarily experiences it and the world as the audience can imagine it to be.

In appearance and movement, three principal characters of the central story are deliberately fashioned as contrasting figures. Their dances do not advance the story itself. Rather, their entrances are presented as acts of revelation highlighted within the narrative structure. Dalem Waturenggong appears in a white mask with almond-shaped

eyes and a fine black mustache. His headdress is covered with flowers. The gestures used by the Dalem are flowing, graceful, and delicate, with a sense of inner strength and great pride. Jelantik's mask is of a more earthy, natural color. The eyes are wider, the smile larger. The stance accompanying the mask is wider, the movements sharper. The debt to the martial arts is clear. As Jelantik, Kakul presents a figure of great dignity and strength, alert to everything about him, but without the hypertension that the red-faced *Patih* exhibited in the *pengelembar*. As Sri Dalem Blambangan, King of Blambangan and "villain" of the evening, Kakul wears a red demon's mask with bulging eyes, large boar's tusks, and a protruding tongue over which there is an opening to allow for speech. Covering his hands are white gloves equipped with six-inch fingernails made of water buffalo horn and tufted with animal fur. He is revealed perched on the back of a chair, legs wide apart, hands thrust aggressively forward and to the side, with fingers spread apart and trembling.

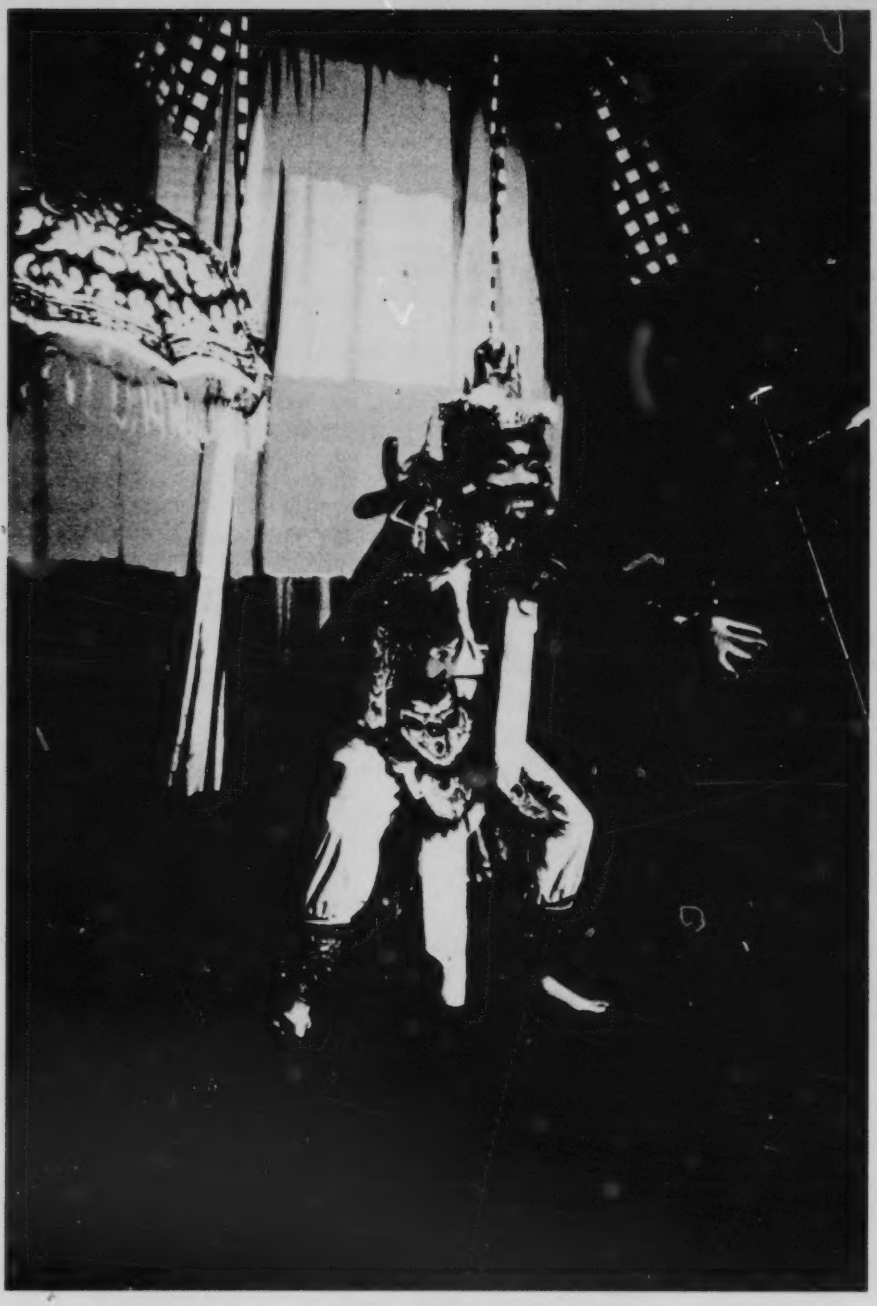
These masks and the postures and movements associated with them do not derive from descriptions in the historical chronicles, but, rather, from performance tradition and typology. Indeed, the mask used for Dalem Waturenggong could also be used for any other refined king; and the mask used for the Sri Dalem Baimbangan can also be used for the god Mahadewa in his terrible aspect. The point is not to present these figures "as they were," but as they ought to be imagined. The story is a scaffolding used to show essentialized images of human capabilities.

Bondres: *Joking and Reflexivity*

The dramatic line of action comes to an end with the report of Patih Jelantik's death on the field of battle. With that event, a successful synthesis of the thematic lines enmeshed within the dramatic "plot" is achieved. Jelantik's father is freed from his curse and the honor of Gelgel is preserved in a single heroic action. Yet, the performance continues. Indeed, the Penasar Cenikan's report of the resolution of the dramatic themes seems perfunctory and the audience's interest intensifies and quickens rather than dissipates with the entrance of the next character. It is time for *bondres*: a parade of clowns offering jokes that seem ever so loosely connected to the dramatic action. For the Balinese audience, this is a happily anticipated part of any *topeng* performance. In Kakul's performance, the jokes bear a direct relationship to the themes and actions of the dramatic "plot": the jokes work reflexively, by turning the audience's attention back in upon those themes.

The Penasar Kelihan touts the ethos of "ancient Bali." The three dancing principals of the dramatic plot embody that ethos. Cenikan stands in awe of it. King, hero, villain, and servants all function in their given orbits within this ethos. The next three characters to appear, however, offer alternative modes of behavior that cannot be assimilated within the structure of values shared by the warriors, courtiers, and kings of "ancient Bali." Through these *bondres* characters, Kakul is able to position himself outside of the realm of punctilious behavior and heroic self-sacrifice. The truths of this realm are revealed as partial.

The first in this succession of clowns, jokesters, and outsiders is named Se Mata Mata. His very name—loosely translatable as One-Who-Looks-Out-For-Himself—is an affront to the noble values of Jelantik, who sacrifices his life for the restitution of his country's honor and the salvation of his cursed father's soul. Se Mata Mata's first "word" is a sneeze, immediately violating all of the elaborate linguistic protocol thus far used to narrate the *babad* episode of Jelantik's mission to Blambangan. He then proceeds to string together nonsense syllables that resolve themselves in inanities and obscenities,



Author performing in a mask of the type used for Sri Dalem Blambangan.

assuring the audience that even if they don't catch the words, they won't miss the meaning. The "meaning" is to be found precisely in the assault on the elaborate linguistic structure that Kakul has himself created, composed of layers of language drawn from the distant and honored past, as well as the "high" and "low" levels of speech used in the status-conscious present. Se Mata Mata performs acts of linguistic vandalism and the audience roars with laughter.

The range of the assault broadens as Se Mata Mata proceeds to sing an "Indonesian national anthem," repeating the phrase "defend the country" over and over again in modern Indonesian. Each time the phrase is uttered, the audience laughs. The joke here seems to be concerned with the awkward fit of the values extolled in Jelantik's story to the ambiguous loyalties that the Balinese feel towards the contemporary nation-state of Indonesia. Kakul forces this comparison by insisting that he, Se Mata Mata, began the fighting on the beaches of Blambangan by singing this Indonesian refrain. The claim is preposterous, of course, and the audience's laughter reveals that they are in on the joke, knowing Se Mata Mata to be a braggart and a liar. I believe that the joke goes deeper, though, and that the audience's laughter may also reveal an awareness that the "truths" associated with the chronicles of the feudal past can lose their certainty when applied to the realities of the present.

Jumping from his transparently vainglorious claim to be the true hero of the dramatic events at Blambangan, Se Mata Mata next acknowledges the laughter that he has generated and points out one laughing member of the audience as "his girlfriend." The mask of Se Mata Mata makes this joke doubly funny. It appears to represent something between a pig and a man and is hinged so that when the character talks, it opens to reveal a set of wonderfully hideous crooked teeth. The aspect of this mask is as far from the heroic countenance of Jelantik as it could possibly be; and to think of this mask as the object of romantic attachment is to engage in delicious nonsense. Wearing this mask, Kakul does not simply portray a piggy man; he presents a laughable embodiment of human swinishness.

In this anti-heroic mask, Kakul proceeds to dance *baris*, the warrior's dance related historically, musically and choreographically to the heroic dance of Jelantik. The performance is an hysterically funny parody. The audience delights both in Kakul's making fun of his own mastery of dance and in the violation of the dignity and grace he brought to Jelantik's appearance in the performance oval. The effect is not, finally, to make fun of Jelantik or to negate the importance of his presence; rather, it is to amplify the scope of the world represented in performance so that it can contain both the feudal hero and his contemporary antithesis.

The next character to emerge, Desak Made Rai, further expands the scope of this world. Up until her entrance, the play has been all male. The first vernacular words spoken by the Penasar Kelihan express his happiness at becoming a bachelor once again. The Penasar Cenikan takes Jelantik's suggestion that he might wish to stay with his wife rather than march off to war as an insult and draws the audience's laughter as he mentions the "sacrifice" of leaving home. Jelantik's heroic dance, accompanied by an all-male orchestra, is derived in part from the male skills of martial arts and a blustering macho pride pervades the movement and speech of the Penasar Kelihan. Into this world, Desak Made Rai enters: flirting, teasing, cajoling the orchestra, and accusing *brahmanas* in the audience of trying to pinch her.

Kakul's female impersonation is funny, to be sure; but the jokes here do not at all play upon womanly ways. The masculine world that Desak Made Rai intrudes upon is made fun of as well. When Kakul performs dances intended for women, they are not parodied. In other dance forms in Bali, the ideal male heroes—Rama, for example, or

Kakul as Se Mata Mata.

Arjuna—are often performed by women. The understanding seems to be that in the ideal person, male strength is combined with feminine grace. The world of traditional *topeng* is essentially masculine in its conventions and concerns, but the entrance of Made Rai partially redresses an imbalance.

The appearance of the final *bondres* character creates an even more startling intrusion into the world of warriors, kings, and courtiers. Pulling his brightly colored and gilded cape up over his head and shoulders so as to reveal the stained white lining, Kakul emerges as Cucul, a shivering, whining peasant, far too caught up in his own domestic problems to feel himself a part of history. As a *jaba*, or *sudra*, Cucul's concerns are not those of the King's, warriors, courtiers, and merchants who comprise the *triwangsa* or upper-three castes. His deeds and concerns will not be chronicled. Jelantik's noble self-sacrifice and the defeat of Sri Dalem Blambangan mean far less to him than the fact that his wife has left him.

There is a circularity about the dialog of the story. The first line of vernacular dialog forms a joke about a man's happiness at being rid of his wife. The last line of vernacular dialog is spoken by a man who is desolate because his wife has left him. The very first lines of the play tell in an almost forgotten language of "a King, rich, proud, . . . full of dignity" and "truly magnificent"—a King, by the way, who was in the habit of killing off his brides. The last lines of the play are spoken in plain speech by a poor man who wishes his wife would come back home. Having created a world dominated by Kings and warriors, Kakul, the *sudra* performer, ends the story with the image of a common man, at once comic and pathetic, caught outside of the glorious world of noble heroes and demonic villains.

Once again, and in a far more elaborate manner, the movement has been towards the human and the contemporary. Within each section of the performance, the same pattern is discernible. In the introductory dances, the arrogant red-faced *Patih* yields to the lovable old man. The Penasar Kelihan yields his role as narrator to the far more prosaic Penasar Cenikan. The high-flown, sung and chanted languages of the ancestral past yield to Balinese vernacular speech. The heroes and villains of the chronicles yield the playing space to the clowns of the *bondres*. The fantastic and eccentric Se Mata Mata yields to the all too familiar Cucul. This pattern is cyclical. Fantastic and extraordinary figures keep appearing from the remote past; but, time and again, these figures are supplanted by other figures far closer to human life as experienced in the present. It is not that the noble and demonic personages of the chronicled past are obliterated: to the contrary, *topeng* performances serve to keep these characters alive. The performances also serve to contain these figures, though; and this playful process of reciprocal revitalization and containment is finally what *topeng* is all about. In the process, it celebrates the vitality of the present as well as the grandeur of the past.

Topeng *and Caste*

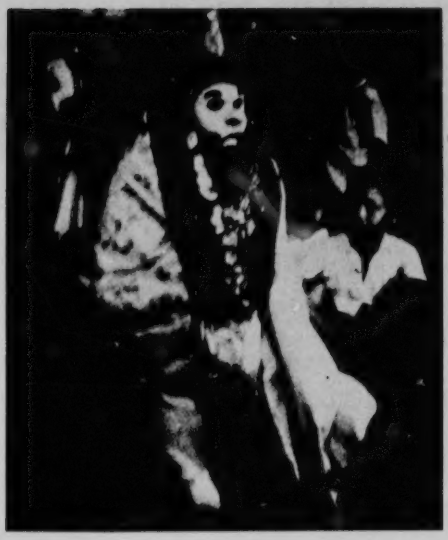
Clifford Geertz notes in *Politics Past, Politics Present* (1967) that Balinese ceremonials provide "public dramatization of the ruling obsessions of Balinese culture: social inequality and status pride." Certainly caste roles are important in the "drama" enacted by Kakul: Jelantik is aware of himself as an exemplary *ksatriya* warrior; and the Kings and servants who provide the occasion and support for his actions within the dramatic world of illusion all see themselves as acting within a matrix of values and possibilities that are largely caste-determined. In Kakul's performance at Tusan though, much of the humor of the *bondres* section seems to play *against* this caste-consciousness, and in each section of the performance there is a movement away from the rigors of caste-conscious behavior towards more all-embracing images of humanity.

Caste, though sometimes an important determinant of behavior in Balinese life, does not determine whether or not a man may be a performer nor what roles he may perform. Kakul, though a *sudra*, is particularly well known for his depiction of refined Kings as well as his *bondres* characters. There are *brahmana* performers in Bali who are particularly well known as Penasars. In *topeng* forms using more than one actor, it is not unheard of for a *brahmana* or *ksatriya* performer to be playing a cringing servant to an overbearing Prime Minister played by a *sudra*. After the performance, the language conventions will be reversed, and the protocol appropriate to the caste distinctions outside of the theatrical roles will be reinstated. This dispersal of roles across caste lines can be played with, as when Kakul teases the *brahmana* for "trying to pinch" Desak Made Rai, and, most notably, when he steps out of the role of Penasar Kelihan to joke about himself as an "old dog" without much hair left, or when he chastises the leader of the *gamelan* (who happened to be a *ksatriya* in Tusan), for playing faster than he wished.

It would be far too pat to call *topeng pajegan* a "ritual of status reversal;" but it is necessary to point out that, while *topeng* performances do dramatize situations based on "social inequality and status pride," the range of attitudes portrayed in handling these dramatic themes is complex. The most startling instance of this complexity comes in Kakul's last appearance in the playing space.

Sidha Karya: The Performer as Priest

The performance is not over. Although there will be no more mention of Jelantik and his mission, and no more jokes reflexively playing back upon the contextual world of his heroic actions, Kakul will enter through the curtain and into the playing space one



Kakul as Cucul.

Sidha Karya offers prayers for the village in the public ritual that concludes the performance.

last time. He wears a white mask of hideous aspect, with a gaping mouth and protruding teeth. On his head is an unkempt wig made up of horse's hair. The character is Sidha Karya, and his appearance is necessary in every *topeng pajegan* performance.

Sidha Karya is a character from the *babads*, recorded as having lived during the reign of Dalem Waturenggong. But his story is independent of Jelantik's and he would appear whether or not the *topeng* story was "set" in Dalem Waturenggong's reign. As he himself states, his appearance is required if the event is to be "successful": indeed, his name means One-Who-Makes-The-Ceremony-Successful. The story of how he got that name is worth relating here, even though there is only a single oblique reference to that story in the performance "text."

After the Hindu migrations from Majapahit, the god Mahadewa came to be associated with the "mother temple" of Basakih, high on the slopes of Gunung Agung. During the reign of Dalem Waturenggong, Dewa Mahadewa summoned a priest known as Brahmana Keling, who was still living in East Java, to come to Besakih. Dalem Waturenggong was preparing for a great ceremony to be held at Besakih at that time and, as preparations were being made, Brahmana Keling arrived. He told the sentries to deliver to Dalem Waturenggong the message that his brother, Brahmana Keling, wished to be received. Upon hearing this message, Dalem Waturenggong was puzzled and angry. He denied having any such brother, and refused to meet with the wandering priest. Summarily dismissed, Brahmana Keling warned that Dewa Mahadewa would be displeased at the King's actions. Soon after the priest's departure, a swarm of locusts descended from the sky and a horde of hungry rats came out of the irrigation ditches of the rice fields. Together, the locusts and the rats devoured the rice in the fields. Famine swept the land and many died in a terrible epidemic. Without the rice, offerings could not be made and the great ceremony had to be postponed. Realizing that he had been in error, Dalem Waturenggong summoned Brahmana Keling to him and publicly received him as his "brother." Soon, the locusts and rats vanished. The spread of disease was stayed and rice fields once more turned green. The great ceremony at Basakih was held one year after it had been originally scheduled; and this time, Brahmana Keling officiated as high priest. Dewa Mahadewa was pleased. Brahmana Keling became known as Sidha Karya in memory of the successful event and was appointed the high priest of a temple in Denpasar, the current capital city of Bali.

The story of Sidha Karya is formed around the uneasy sharing of priestly and secular power between the *brahmana* and *ksatriya* castes in Hindu Bali. The name of Brahmana Keling hearkens back to the ancient Kalinga empire of India and probably places the roots of this story in the early encounters between Hindu priests and the feudal lords of Sumatra and Java. Much of the appeal of the story is in its patterning: a mysterious, threatening, and potentially destructive force is turned into a force for well-being by a process of recognition, and inclusion.

In the *babad* story, Brahmana Keling, the potential destroyer of Bali, becomes Sidha Karya, the principal intermediator with the gods, once his divinely arranged place in the scheme of things is discovered and acknowledged. The ceremony that ends a *topeng pajegan* performance does not refer directly to this story, but the treatment of Sidha Karya is patterned around a knowledge of it. Sidha Karya's aspect is awesome in its ugliness and otherworldliness; yet, he is called forth as the emissary of Dewa Mahadewa, manifestation of the Holy Presence, incorporating all divinity within his person. The performance model is again that of visitation, but this time without the wrappings of dramatic illusion.

As Sidha Karya, Kakul will alternately take on the functional roles of ancestral character, emissary of the gods, embodiment of the godhead itself, and intercessor for the assembled audience. In short, he is a mediating figure, adjusting his role within the ritualized proceedings so as to "successfully" deliver the offerings of man to the gods and the blessings of gods to men. The languages used now are Sanskrit and Kawi—the first being the medium of exchange used by the priests when addressing the Hindu deities, and the second being the language associated with the ancestors of Majapahit

who brought those deities with them to Bali and who are still understood to accompany the gods on their occasional visitations "into this world" and "upon this earth."

It is common in Bali for performance genres regarded as "secular" to be given as offerings of religious occasions: stories are enacted to please and amuse the divine as well as the secular audience. It is also common in Bali for acts of offering to be ritually performed with an emphasis on style and grace: the presentation of food offerings is often danced to the accompaniment of music. *Topeng pajegan*, also called *topeng wali* (ritual *topeng*), combines these two traditions. Ritual and theatrical frames cannibalize each other. Ritual patterns of visitation are embraced and subsumed by theatrical presentation, and a theatrical world of illusion is in turn, embraced and subsumed by ritual ceremony. The pervasive traditions of visitation pave the way for the introduction of a dramatic world and this world is then supplanted by an act of visitation. Throughout, a playful tension is maintained between these two esthetic traditions. In the dances, Kakul alternates, including and excluding the audience. As Penasar Kelihan, he leaps from the role of character to the role of performer and back again. As Sidha Karya, a jumping of frames occurs as Kakul alternates between being a priestly mediator and portraying an embodiment of the godhead. In the overall shape of the performance, a transformation takes place: in the introductory and "dramatic" sections, the performance is to be regarded as an offering; in the Sidha Karya section, an offering is performed. Kakul's private ritual of preparation asking for the gods' blessings leads to the performance of a public ritual in which these blessings are conferred on the community.

Kakul can only take on the role of priestly mediator because of his skills as a dancer and storyteller. A priest cannot perform the Sidha Karya ceremony himself and Kakul would not perform it without previously doing the rest of the performance. We are left with a bewildering and intriguing paradox: the village of Tusan, with a large *brahmana* population, must bring in an outside performer, a *sudra*, in order to complete successfully a ceremony attending the cremation of a high priest. Within the context of performance, Kakul becomes what he plays. For a time, within the mask of Sidha Karya that he is privileged to wear, he functionally *is* the "priest of *dharma*," emissary from the gods and intercessor for mankind.

Kakul's last actions as Sidha Karya constitute what may be the most startling event of the whole performance. The "priest of *dharma*" takes the coins from Dewa Mahadewa's offering, throws them towards the children who line the inside of the audience oval, and calls to them in modern Indonesian—the language of the schools. The children scramble to pick up the coins and then run screaming as the terrifying and otherworldly Sidha Karya chases after them. Their faces register fear and thrilled excitement. Sidha Karya, who is also known as the Pengejukan, or One-Who-Takes-People-Up-In-His-Arms, then grabs hold of one of the children and bears him aloft. He sets the child down next to the offering prepared for Dewa Mahadewa himself and gives the child some of the food, whereupon the excited child returns to the smiling audience. The performer takes one last turn of the playing space and, still in the mask of Sidha Karya, he exits for the last time through the curtain. There is no curtain call. The music stops and the audience slowly disperses.

Returning Home

Behind the curtain, Kakul removes his last mask. He has performed at an extraordinarily high pitch of energy for an hour and a half and is thoroughly exhausted. His face and body pour sweat. I am amazed to rediscover how tiny and vulnerable this man is

who has just embodied a whole universe. The masks are blessed and put away. Layer by layer, the costume is removed. There is time for resting, joking with friends, polite exchanges with the *brahmana* and *ksatriya* patrons, the drinking of a strong, clear, distilled liquor called *arak*, and the eating of another big meal. Two of Kakul's sons and several more performers arrive. There will be another *topeng* performance later that night, this time a secular performance (without Sidha Karya) involving nine actors, including Kakul. A rain squall moves past, causing a delay, and this performance does not start until well after 11 o'clock and it lasts until about 4 o'clock in the morning. The rows of children are often asleep now, lying upon one another and waking to appreciate bits of *bondres*. In between appearances, the performers catch naps behind the curtain. Despite the hour, the audience remains large and appreciative, sometimes chatting as the story slowly unfolds, other times caught up in the antics and entanglements of the story's characters or arrested by the virtuosity of a dance.

After the last character swirls through the curtain, the actors sit together talking, joking, resting, waiting for dawn and the first mini-truck for Batuan. It comes and all pile in, crowding two deep amidst the baskets of costumes and masks. Some of the performers will go directly to the rice fields, while others are free to go home. In a corner of the jouncing mini-truck, Kakul lies with his head against a basket, his work finished, his face serene in sleep.

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I Ketut Kantor, I Made Regug, and I Wayan Tedun all taught me a great deal about the Balinese use of masks and masking while I was in Bali. In this country, Amy Catlin, Fritz DeBoer and Andrew Toth have all made helpful suggestions, as have I Nyoman Sumandhi, I Nyoman Wenten, and, especially, I Made Bandem. Richard Wallis lent me a copy of his 1978 University of Michigan dissertation which helped me a great deal in writing the section on Languages of topeng, *as did A. L. Beeker's forthcoming article on Javanese* Wayang Kulit. *Finally, there is a pervasive debt to I Wayan Suweca, who I worked with for three years.*

Jelantik Goes to Blambangan

A *Topeng Pajegan* Performance By I Nyoman Kakul

(as recorded at Tusan, Klungkung, Bali on February 6, 1975)

Language Key

During this performance, I Nyoman Kakul speaks in seven different languages (see preceding article). To differentiate between them, each language has been set in a different typeface, as follows:

WHEN KAKUL SPEAKS IN SANSKRIT, HIS WORDS LOOK LIKE THIS.
When Kakul speaks in Kawi, his words look like this.
When Kakul speaks in Middle Javanese, his words look like this.
When Kakul speaks in High Balinese, his words look like this.
When Kakul speaks in Medium Balinese, his words look like this.
When Kakul speaks in Low Balinese, his words look like this.
When Kakul speaks in modern Indonesian, his words look like this.

Stage directions and other explanatory material are set in the same typeface as these words.

There are three introductory dances depicting a proud warrior, an antic minister, and an aged courtier. The curtain shakes again and the performer re-enters, wearing a purple half-mask with round, bulging eyes. This is Penasar Kelihan, the "older" storyteller. His bearing is proud, his voice commanding, his laughter hearty, his gestures and dancing flamboyant. Gamelan music accompanies the entire performance.

PENASAR KELIHAN

(singing snatches from the kidung tantri *in Middle Javanese, an archaic, courtly language associated with the theatrical heritage of the Majapahit Empire of East Java)*

A story is told of the King of Patali, rich, proud, and full of dignity. *(dances proudly)* Truly Magnificent! Proceeding now! Aat!

(dancing, mixed with exclamations and laughter)

Ah! Ha, ha, ha, ha! Arah! Hi, hi, hi! Ha, ha, ha!

(chanting lines from the Mahabharata *in Kawi, or Old Javanese, a language introduced to Bali in the 10th Century and still used in the shadow puppet theatre and in chanting the Javanized Indian epics)*

At dawn, the red sun rises. The rustling of leaves on the mountainside joins the harmonious sounds of the frogs, large and small.

(exclaiming and dancing some more)

Aat!

I'm so happy! So happy! I never get bored, telling you about my happiness! Like today! Why don't I get bored, talking about my happiness? Ayah! Hi, hi, hi! Heh! Why am I so happy? Because, I just now became a bachelor again! Hi, hi, hi!

Oh my Lord and King, I try to follow you loyally. I beseech you, lay not your curse upon me, for I am going to tell your story now. Singeh! Singeh! Please! Please! I pay homage to the ancestors, to those who are already holy. And to the divine trinity, the Holy Lords Wisnu, Brahma, and Iswara. And I pay homage as well to all those who would make the countryside peaceful and prosperous here in ancient Bali. I ask for your blessings. I beseech you not to lay your curses upon me.

And why? Why do I offer up these prayers? Because, I am about to tell you of my Lord, the King here in Gelgel, Klungkung, the great Dalem Waturenggong.

(chanting from the Ramayana*) Spinning round on his tail, the son of Subali rises higher and higher.*

(Dances, then speaks, affecting the local Klungkung dialect) Aduh! What a chase those noblemen in the orchestra gave me! Now I'm worn out! Already too tired to give you a show! Mind you, I don't mean to criticize. Not just yet. It's my first time here. My first time dancing with these musicians. Their first time playing with me. And I'm very old-fashioned. Just like an old dog!

There's not much fur left on my hide and what there is of it is very short. Beh! Moving on!

My Lord and Master, Dalem Waturenggong, is the ruler of this kingdom. His mind is troubled now, filled with thoughts of His Royal Highness, His Majesty, the King of Blambangan.

What could have broken up their old friendship? Wah! My King sent a proposal of marriage to the Princess of Blambangan, the King's own daughter, Diah Gusti Ayu Nipang. He sent along a portrait, too. A very fine portrait, bearing an exact likeness of my Lord. So how did things get so screwed up? That portrait got fiddled with. By the jealous Princess Diah Bima Cili of Pasurahan. And now, to judge from that portrait, my Lord is fat! With a big fat nose! And bowlegged and splay-footed, too! And Gusti Ayu Nipang isn't so sure that she wants him anymore. And all this has left my Lord and King in a terrible mood! Oh, mother! So much for peacefulness here in ancient Bali! Ruled over by my Lord and King, like an incarnation of the Holy Lord Wisnû Himself!

(reciting from the Mahabharata*) Since time immemorial, the warrior's path has been one of action.*

And now the King gathers his closest advisors about him to choose the right man to lead his forces into Java. Keyai Blangsinga is his closest advisor. And next to him, Penget Yeh. To Blambangan! To Pasurahan! Someone must go! Let it be done! Nah! Wah!

(Still speaking in medium Balinese, the Penasar Kelihan now speaks as the King. He does not assume completely new voices or characters for these quotations, but remains a storyteller, quoting personages involved in the story with an animated sense of their characters and presence.)

"Honored counselors, all of you who assemble here, what is to be done? Who could best go to Blambangan?"

(reciting from the Mahabharata*) The answer comes quickly. O God-chosen King, I do not hesitate to venture my life in your service. (laughing) Oh, ho! Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha!*

(as Counselors) **"Oh Lord and Majesty, we shall tell you the man to send as your champion. His lineage is from the Ksatriya warriors of Kediri. His name is I Gusti Jelantik Made Tengahan. On the field of battle, he is the most stalwart of men. Your Holiness, send forth no one but this man. Long ago, he dedicated his life to your wishes. Let him go forth!"**

(reciting from the Mahabharata*) When a warrior is brave, he is dedicated to action. His innermost thoughts are of the battlefield. When a warrior is resolute, he will always find action on the field of battle. The ksatriya caste will scourge the earth of selfishness and human greed.*

(as Jelantik) **"You are preeminent among Kings, my Lord."**

(as King) "Release the bonds that oppress the soul."

(as Jelantik) **"So be it! Let the task fall to me! I shall defend the macrocosmos and the microcosmos, the order of the spiritual world and the order of the physical world. For the microcosmos finds expression in the body of every man. And I shall be your Majesty's true champion."**

Bih! His answer to the King is very brave! He would follow the example laid down in the story of Gatut Kaca Seraya:

(reciting from the Mahabharata*) Over there, Gatut Kaca stands. Speak now as a brave son. Kresna already knows you must face the invincible Karna.*

I, too, will be brave.

Wih! Wih! Wih! Pack up! Pack up, servants! Get ready for a fight! (singing and dancing) Ndaaaaaaa. (laughing) Aruh! Hi, hi, hi. Eh! (with Klungkung dialect) I'm winded! Out of breath! Dancing too fast! I was almost stumbling there at the end. Hi, hi, hi. Ha, ha, ha, ha! Aduh!

I could go on forever, talking about the wisdom and greatness of my Lord and King. Whoever is obedient to the King, whoever is steadfast in his service to the King, that man shall go forth as the King's true champion. Yes! Yes! And now the King himself is on his way.

The Prime Minister and all the honored counselors are ready to greet you in the hall of justice. I beseech you, your Majesty, come forward!

(singing from the Kidung Malat, *used in the Gambuh theatre)* His shape is so beautiful. His face is so radiant. Before entering the hall, he glances in the mirror and adjusts his temple dress. *(Departing from the* Kidung Malat *text)* Like he's off to the market in Batavia-a-a *(laughing)* Oh!, He, he, he! Ah! Ha, ha, ha! *(singing from the* Kidung Malat, *while the gamelan begins the introductory music for the Dalem's entrance.)* The air is transformed. It is all gentleness and prettiness.

(as king) "My loyal servants, Open now your ears and hear me well."

(as counselors) **"We await your words, oh Lord."**

(as King) "Approach my person now, loyal followers of mine, and take your proper places behind me."

(singing from the Kidung Malat*)* A small ring is a bracelet for the finger. *(spoken)* Thus is the world constructed! Ah!

And now my honored Lord, I beseech you to pray to the gods.

After the robes of majesty are in place, my Lord, then Pray to the Supreme God, lest you receive his curse. (singing) Beautiful, beautiful! See how beautiful!

Pay homage to the gods, that you be not cursed.

(singing from the Kidung Malat*)* You will come forth, dancing beautifully.

(as King) **"Inggih! I salute the Supreme God!"** *"I would receive your blessings now. And also a blessing upon my people."* "My ministers, my people, you must give me your prayers." *"I would now come forth among you."*

Please, come forth, my Lord.

(Kakul exits as Penasar Kelihan. As the gamelan plays the King's theme, Kakul changes his mask and headdress and reenters with the handsome white mask of Dalem Waturenggong, King of Gelgel. The King dances and then exits. The music changes and Kakul again changes his mask and headgear. He reenters in the half-mask of the Penasar Cenikan, or younger storyteller, named I Ketut Rai. He is without the pretensions of the first storyteller, his walk is more natural, his gestures less flamboyant, his speech more colloquial).

PENASAR CENIKAN

(singing from the Kidung Malat*)* Dressed up in temple clothes, I go to see my love.

Once more, Prince Karna's story is told.

Aduh! Ah, ha, ha! Here it comes! Karna's story again! Only our hero now is I Gusti Jelantik. What is he feeling, deep in his heart? To lose the battle would be shameful. He must preserve the honor and happiness of Gelgel.

(singing) **The King's command must be obeyed.**

Aid! Beh! Nah! But hold on! *(To the gamelan leader, using his caste title)* Slowly, slowly Cakorda! Let's not get ahead of ourselves! Me, I'm happy! And without eating a thing! I'm happy just getting ready for this battle. A man like Jelantik can set a good example for the people here in Gelgel. *(singing)* **In the end, there will be happiness.** And why? I'm just a servant. Only a servant. But since I follow a lord who practices dharma, a man of the battlefield, why then, even though I'm only of the Wesya caste myself, I can be a warrior, too. Just call me Ketut Rai the invincible!

I would venture my soul for my country, for Gelgel. Listen now to my words, for I am a follower of the great I Gusti Jelantik Made Tengahan!

Pih! That Jelantik was brave and cool, talking to the King.

Rejoice! For Jelantik Made Tengahan will be the defender of the country!

Ah, ha, ha! The King says, "Honored sir, are you ready to go to Blambangan?" And Jelantik answers,

(as Jelantik) **"So be it, my Lord! Let me go forth! Do not trouble yourself further!"**

(with Klungkung dialect) I am told by I Gusti Patih Jelantik, "You are my ser-

vant. Of course, you should come with me and obey my orders." That's what he tells me! But if you are afraid of dying, why don't you just sleep with your wife at home?" That's what he says to me!

"How else can I prove my devotion to you? On what occasion, if not now? You needn't speak further. For many years now, I have served you faithfully as your loyal retainer. It would be impossible for me to turn my back upon you now. Your kindnesses to me have been many. How shall I bear them? How can I ever repay you?"

That's really what I said to him! So, follow him I will!

(reciting from the Mahabharata*)* *The brave man shall be victorious upon the field of battle.*

"If you should emerge victorious from the field of battle, then all the gods and celestial nymphs will pay homage to you. But if you should taste defeat upon the field of battle, then you shall be punished by Sang Hyang Yama Depati on the day of your judgment. Eh? Is that not true? You suggest that I might turn my back upon the call to battle. No! Even though I must leave my wife! Nothing could stop me from venturing forth!"

(as Jelantik) "Nah! Nah! If that's the way it is, then let's get going."

"So be it, my Lord!"

Eh, he, he! "But before we leave," says I Gusti Patih Jelantik, "I would speak with my wife, Ni Gusti Ayu Samwantiga. This is a precious time for us, for she is now bearing our child."

"Yes, my Lord. What will you say to her?"

(as Jelantik) "My love, it is true. I must go now and leave you. The King has ordered me to Blambangan to seize victory for him on the field of battle. Why must this be? Listen. Listen, for there is a great deal that I must tell you now. Long ago, my father was Prime Minister here in Gelgel. Knowing this, I have questioned the high priest in front of all the assembled ministers. 'My priest,' I have said, 'If a man should become a person of great power, what are the dangers for him, and what are the joys?'"

(reciting from the Mahabharata*)* *The answer is not long in coming.*

(as Priest) "My son, Jelantik Made Tengahan, if a man of responsibility and power falls in love with his own father's wife, the fortunes of the entire country will suffer and decline."

(as Jelantik) **"Inggih! But what is the proper action for me? Speak to me so that I may understand. What should I do now?"**

(as Priest) "Properly, you should tear up your ministerial robes, burn them, and throw the ashes into the ocean. That would be correct."

(exclaiming) Beh! Beh!

(as Priest) "But you are a man much honored in this land and one who carries the word of the King. There are many who depend upon you. You cannot afford to act rashly."

(as Jelantik) **"I am aware of this and do not wish to set a bad example for my people. My priest, please advise me and I shall follow wherever your words may lead."**

That's what he said! Pih! Aduh! I feel so sorry for him. I don't know how long ago these problems began. But some time ago, a voice came rising up from the Unda River in Batu Kerotok. "Son! My son! Jelantik Made Tengahan!" Beh! "My beloved child! My precious nugget of gold!" A cowherd came ambling by. Beh! Just a young boy. "Please! Go and get my son, I Gusti Jelantik Tengahan." Beh!

(as Cowherd) *"Who's that talking in the river? A god? A spirit? what is it?"*

(exclaiming) *Nah!*

(as Voice) *"Get going! And repeat what you heard to my son."*

(as Cowherd) "Yes! Yes! But what's happening? I don't understand."

Fortunately, I Gusti Jelantik Made Tengahan was sitting in the courtyard.

(as Jelantik) *"Why do you come rushing into the courtyard like this?"*

(as Cowherd) **"Noble Sir, I heard a voice coming from the Unda River. A voice calling out your name."**

(as Jelantik) *"What voice? Saying what?"*

(as Cowherd quoting Voice) "Son! My son! Ngurah Jelantik Made Tengahan! Help! It's your father! If you don't rescue me from my curse, I can never reach sorga, never go to heaven."

(as Jelantik) *"Really?"*

And then I Gusti Jelantik picked up a fishing net and played at catching fish.

(as Jelantik) "I'm not sure about this. The cowherd may not be telling the truth."

So he started for the river. And he brought the fishing net with him.

"My honored lord," I say, **"I want to accompany you. I really do."**

(as Jelantik) *"Beh! You go with me?"*

"Please, my lord. I wish to accompany you."

(as Jelantik) *"Alright, let's go then. We'll look for some shrimp. Did you bring any bait?"*

"No, my lord."

(as Jelantik) *"Well, go get some bait!"*

We arrive at the Unda River. Beh! We throw the fishing net out to the South. Nothing.

(as Jelantik) *"Where did the cowherd say that voice was coming from?"*

Still nothing there! We throw the net out to the North. Beh! Nothing there, either. By now we're ready to throw away the net. Seret! Pleh! Then we see something shaped like a beetle-nut canister. But it's as large as a ceremonial umbrella. Beh! It's a leech as big as a roofing mat! Aduh! There's the leech, all curled up. And hairy, too! Beh! Mun, mun, mun! That big!

"What could it be, I Gusti Patih?" *(as Jelantik)* *"Quiet! Shush!"*

Aduh! Aduh!

(as Leech) "Son! My son! Ngurah Jelantik Made Tengahan! I am your father. Come. Come closer to me. I committed a terrible sin one day, after coming home from the palace at Gelgel. I arrived at home, I entered the house, and I went to my bed. My father's wife was lying there. I slept with her that night. And now, if you do not release me from this curse, my life shall never be complete and I shall stay forever in this hellish state."

(as Jelantik) **"Father, what can I do to release you from this dreadful curse?"**

(as Leech) "The only way is for you to die in the midst of battle. Only if you die on the battlefield, can I end this horrible water-bound existence as a leech."

(as Jelantik) **"Yes, father. Please. Be at peace now. Allow me to do this for you. I shall become the defender of the macrocosmos and the microcosmos, of the spiritual order and of the physical order, an order that finds expression in my own body. I shall sacrifice my life for my father at the same time that I defend the Kingdom of Gelgel."**

Nah! Alright! Getting on with the story!

Inggih! Inggih! Gusti Patih Jelantik! Come forth! The time has come for you to reveal yourself! Ndaaaaaa!

(Kakul dances briefly as Penasar Cenikan and then exits through the curtain. He continues to talk from behind the

curtain as he changes his headgear and mask for the entrance of I Gusti Jelantik Made Tengahan. First he sings lines from the kidung malat in Middle Javanese in order to give the orchestra a musical pattern to use for Jelantik's entrance and dance.)

Beautiful rocky heights! Beautiful rocky heights! So beautiful is the sound of the beaten gong!

(as Jelantik) *"Nah! Nah! Get us ready servants!"*

Inggih! Inggih! Gusti! The time is now at hand for my lord to venture forth!

Now his entrance! Now the entrance of I Gusti Ngurah Jelantik Tengahan! If you were to search for another like him, you could only compare him to the Holy Lord Brahma. No one else! Now his departure is at hand! He will pray to the six mother temples of Bali. No one can stop him from going forth! Eh!

(The curtain shakes and Kakul enters as I Gusti Ngurah Jelantik Made Tengahan. Wearing a handsome orange-tinged mask that covers his full face, he dances then exits through the curtain. After Kakul has changed his mask and headgear, the voice of the Penasar Kelihan is heard from behind the curtain.)

PENASAR KELIHAN

Pih! His prayer! Oh my lord!

(chanting) *With sceptor in hand, with the knowledge of Saraswati, he prays to the gods. Holy water from the Ganges completes the ceremony.*

(The curtain shakes and the Penasar Kelihan enters, speaking) **Beh! Almost daybreak!**

Meneh! Feel the difference? Beh! The signal for daybreak comes down from the mother temple of Besakih! Beh!

(In the section that follows, Kakul as Penasar Kelihan will repeatedly sing passages from the Javanese Mahabharata, then roughly translate those passages into the vernacular.)

At the foot of the mountain, they awake at dawn.

Aduh! They wake up at dawn.

Like shadow puppets shimmering upon a screen.

That's the feeling. Just like shadow puppets on the screen.

The interlocking sounds of the frogs signal daybreak.

Bih! The rushing, cascading sounds of the large frogs.

(imitating the frogs with a rhythmic chant) Ke kung ke ke kung ke kung. Ke kung ke ke kung ke kung.

Answered now by the small frogs.

And the small frogs answer.

Over there, on the far bank of the river.

From the far bank of the river. Beh! A man no longer thinks of his home. He no longer imagines himself in Gelgel.

The rushing of the water.

Beh! The water rushes by.

He no longer dreams of returning to home.

He no longer wants to go home.

The banks of the river are beautiful, beautiful! Over there will I pay homage to the gods.

He makes his offerings.

(singing) **The priest's wife awakens with her husband. They attend to his duties, singing *malat* and blessing the offerings.**

Malat is sung and the offerings blessed.

Inggih! Inggih, Gusti!

(spoken) *Prepare yourself. Now he goes to fight Sri Dalem Blambangan. Irika!*

(Kakul exits through the curtain as Penasar Kelihan and changes into the mask used for the King of Blambangen. This is a mask of the demonic type, with bulging eyes, enormous pig tusks, a protruding tongue, and a hole below the tongue to speak through. He also puts on fur-tufted white gloves with long, quivering fingernails attached. He perches himself on the back of a chair and begins to speak and shake the curtain vigorously.)

DALEM BLAMBANGAN

Irika! Yeh! Oh! Ha, ha! Ih! Luweh! Ih, ih, ih! Eh! Luweh! Ehhh! Behold, here I come, King of Blambangan! Prepare yourselves! Beware! Yeh! Kascarya! Ulduhhh!

(Kakul yanks the curtain open, revealing himself as King of Blambangan, perched loftily on his throne. He continues to speak reaching through the curtain opening towards the audience and making his long fingernails tremble.

Ehh! Eh, eh, eh, eh! Who are you people? What do you want here? Ih, ih, ih, ih! Give me your names! What land are you from? Come, come! Speak! At once! Irika! Speak up! Speak up!

(The torso and arms of the King move to frenzied music. The curtain is then pulled shut and Kakul changes his mask and headgear and reenters through the curtain as Penasar Cenikan.)

PENASAR CENIKAN

Beh! Such a short fight! The King of Blambangan is dead. Aduh! Ha, ha! The timing was perfect. My lord caught sight of Dalem Blambangan strolling along the beach. *(with Klungkung dialect)* Ahh! We just rolled right over him. He was helpless! *(dropping dialect)* How could the King of Blambangan be killed so easily? Because, long ago he received the curse of Pedanda Bawurawah, high priest of Majapahit. That's true! And now, the warriors return to Gelgel. But my Holy Lord . . . I mean my noble Lord! I got mixed up. Well, anyways I'm out here all alone, so I can say whatever I want! Ha, ha, ha! Now the warriors return, but my noble Lord Jelantik has found death on the field of battle. He must be cremated now. Sampunika! Like that! Nah! Nah!

(as Dalem Waturenggong) "Jelantik is gone. but, since Jelantik's wife is now carrying his child, when that child is born we shall name him I Gusti Jelantik Bogol, Jelantik the Brave. And now, since the honor of the country has been defended, there must be ceremonies and celebrations. Let there be splendid performances in three days time!"

(Kakul exits through the curtain and changes his mask and headgear. The curtain shakes and he reenters in a mask with a hinged jaw as Se Mata Mata, half pig and half man, One-Who-Looks-Out-For-Himself.)

SE MATA MATA

(sneezing) Ahchoo! Ahhhchoo! *(nonsense syllables mixed with medium and low Balinese)* Ah! Ka, ka, ka, ka. Ka, ko, ko, ke, ka, ke. Ne, ni, ni, ni, ni, Ih, ih, ih, ih. Ay, ay, ay. Aw, aw, aw, off to the palace! Where is it? Off I go now! Hu, hu, hu, hu, hu. Pi, pi, pi, piss, pissstachio! Nice! Where now? Sa, sa, sa, sa, sa. Ra, ra, ra, ra, ra. Hi, hi, hi, hi, hi. Don't worry if you don't catch the words, you won't miss the meaning! Sa, sa, sa, sa.

(singing) ***Defend the country. Defend the country. Defend the country. Defend the country. Defend the country. Defend the country.***

That's an Indonesian national anthem for you.

(singing) ***Remember the gods. Remember the gods. Remember the gods.***

Remember the gods.

Now I have something I want to say. I followed my Lord Gusti Jelantik to Blambangan. I was right there at the head of the army. Started the fighting myself! I did it like this.

(singing) ***Defend the country. Defend the country. Defend the country. Defend the country. Indonesia.***

Beh! My girlfriend is laughing over there. That's enough about that! In three days time, I'll be dancing *baris. (imitating the drum pattern of the* baris *dance)* Ka pang an tuk. Ka pang an tuk. Ka pang an tuk. Ka pang an tuk. Wait! Wait! I want to do the real dance now:

(Se Mata Mata begins to dance a parody of the baris*, a warrior's dance related rhythmically and historically to the heroic dance of Jelantik performed earlier.)*

What's next? *Bapang, bapang!*

(The gamelan starts to play the bapang *section of the* baris *dance, which is also parodied.)*

Aruh! I'm tired! Worn out!

(Kakul exits through the curtain. He changes his mask and headgear and reenters in the half-mask of a woman, Desak Made Rai. The character moves with all the coquetry and sly humor of a middle-aged woman who has known life too well for too long.)

DESAK MADE RAI

(singing from the kidung malat*)* I gather flowers and give them to you to make you irresistible. *(laughing)* Ah ha!

My Lord, I don't know what to do now. There have already been enough performances to complete the ceremonies. *Baris* has been performed. And *arja*. And *gambuh*. Performances for three days in a row! Beh! Oh, those *brahmanas* over there are laughing at me. And that one tried to pinch me! I wonder if he'll do that when we're alone. If he does, I'll be very nice to him. Well, I could dance *sutri* for you. No? What about a *legong* dance? The story of Lasem? Or *jobeg*? Please, orchestra, won't you play one of them for me? No? Oh well! Forgive me, I can't perform *sutri* for you. Maybe another dance then? Oh, dear.

(Kakul exits through the curtain. He changes his mask and pulls his gold painted cape up over his head and shoulders so as to show the stained white inner lining. He reenters in the character of Cucul, a miserable villager who seems to be shivering with the chills.)

CUCUL

Aduh! Such a crowd of people gathered in the palace courtyard. All of them so happy! And here I am, so sad and miserable. I don't have any wife. Don't have any children. My wife has gone and left me. Aduh! Bih! If anyone comes to find me, please call out my name: "Brother! Brother Wayan!" What are you thinking about me? Sometimes I feel so dumb! I used to have a

wife. There were times when she wouldn't come home for three days in a row. Even though she promised she would never leave me. Nyoman! Nyoman! Aduh! You're so thoughtless and fickle, Nyoman, leaving me like this. All the happy people crowding around, too! If I don't go to the palace now, what shall I do? You've left me feeling like a shattered stone. Nyoman! Nyoman! Won't you please come back home? Aduh! I'd be so happy, if she would only come back home. Aduh!

(Kakul exits through the curtain. The story is over, but the music changes and Kakul puts on a white mask with prominent teeth and gaping mouth and an unkempt wig. He will reenter as Sidha Karya, a priest during the reign of Dalem Waturenggong who must end each performance of topeng pajagan *by performing ritual ceremonies that confer a blessing upon the village.)*

SIDHA KARYA

(laughing and exclaiming while shaking the curtain from behind) Eh! Ehhh! Ohhhh! Ohh! Singeh! Aat! Ohh! Ohhh! Ih, ih, ih, ih, ih, ih! Ih, ih, ih, ih, ih, ih!

Now the Holy Presence arrives. Now Sidha Karya appears. Coming now, into this world.

(chanting the beginnings of a mantra) OM. EARTH, AIR, AND HEAVENLY ETHER.

(chanting a passage from the Mahabharata*) In a beauteous place, he encounters the devout king.*

(speaking) Make haste! Now he arrives upon this earth!

(Kakul enters through the curtain as Sidha Karya and chants the following dialog in the manner of a priest, often addressing Dewa Mahadewa, god of the Besakih temple.) Oh Divine Lord, you come down to earth, accompanied by all of your celestial followers, drawn as they are from the several castes. All gods descend now in your person. The people assembled here dedicate these offerings unto you. Please do not feel slighted that this is only a suci, *a simple rice cake offering. It will be followed by a* daksine *offering of coconut, eggs, rice, cakes, and old coins. There is also a* tebasan *offering, especially prepared for Sidha Karya, with rice, peanuts, and chicken brought from Sidha Karya's own village, from Badung. And there is a* tebasan duramenggala *offering, all wrapped in coconut leaves to form the shape of a huge gong. This offering is intended for your enjoyment. And to welcome you here, there is a* prasjengan *offering, prepared with the meat of a chicken. Please, accept these offerings as your own. (crying out and dancing) Aat! Aat! Aat!*

(As Sidha Karya continues to dance, he sounds the ten magic syllables used to formulate spells in the practice of both white and black magic in Bali). Sa, Ba, Ta, A, I. Nang, Mang, Sing, Wang, Ya. (crying out) Aat! Aat! Aat! Make haste! Ih, ih, ih, ih, ih!

(chanting in the manner of a priest) *Please accept this offering of food.* (He cries out, dances, and then mimics Dewa Mahadewa's eating of the offering.) *Aat! Aat! Aat!* (chanting in the manner of a priest) *The offering is now accepted.*

(Still chanting in the manner of a priest, he unwraps the gong-shaped tebasan durmanggala.) *This rice, also is for you to eat. This money is dedicated to you as well. Two hundred* Kepeng *in old Chinese coins. A ball of thread for weaving forms a part of the* tebasan durmnaggala, *your special offering. All this has been offered unto you. Please accept this offering. Please accept this offering.*

(He hands the offering to a priest, who sprinkles holy water on it while the performer speaks.) **OM. OM. HOLY WATER NOW BLESSES THIS OFFERING.**

Make haste! Behold the movement of the god! (He dances.) *Listen to the murmuring of the priests offering up their prayers. These prayers are meant only for you, Holy Lord. Only you are entitled to receive them. The offering is now complete. There is nothing lacking. There is no one here, man, woman, or hermaphrodite, who is entering upon a life of evil. There is no one here to be cursed with crippling defects in their next reincarnation. It is the privilege of the priest of* dharma *to purify the people of the effects of evil. If anyone here is greedy or selfish, may he be turned towards goodness. May his vices be taken from him, as impurities are separated from molten metal. Here there is a bounteous feast of food and drink. All persons who assemble here know that I am like the priest Bagawan Wiswakarma in the* Ramayana. *My presence is necessary here that this ceremony may be a success.*

(He lights sticks of incense on offerings handed to him by a priest, then cries out.) *Ehhh! Make haste! Ihhhh!*

(Sidha Karya now talks to the children in the audience in Kawi, but the word he uses for "children" also appears in the vocabulary of high Balinese and would be understandable to them.) *Now, all you children!* (He laughs and takes the old Chinese coins in his hand. Then he continues to speak.) *Ah, ha, ha! You! Children! This is the priest of* dharma. *It is my privilege and duty to catch you, eh children?*

(Excited and frightened, the children in the audience titter and squirm. Still in the role of Sidha Karya, Kakul now addresses them.) **Come here! Come here! Uhhh! Eh, eh, eh!**

(He throws the coins out towards the perimeter of the performance oval. The children scramble to pick up the coins and then scream and run as Sidha Karya, chases after them. Their expressions indicate a combination of fear and excitement. Sidha Karya catches a

child, carries him in his arms around the performance oval, and then releases him and gives him some food from the offering. Without removing the mask of Sidha Karya, Kakul makes a final circle within the oval and exits through the curtain for the last time as the music ends.)

Translated by I Made Bandem and John Emigh

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Becoming A Clown in Bali

by Ron Jenkins

Being a Tourist (first month)

Frogs flourish in the wet ricefields of Bali. Their sounds and rhythms are mimicked with vivid comic precision by clowns in the temple dramas. Continuity between performance and everyday events is a powerful element in Balinese community life. The links are reflected in numerous forms other than dancing frogs, but it was the frogs I noticed first.

I arrived in Bali for a year of theatre research not knowing how I would proceed. Having been a circus clown in the U.S. I was attracted by the comic characters in the Balinese temple dramas. Eventually I moved into a small village, attended numerous performances, and became a regular follower of Topeng masked dancer Made Djimat.

Although I did not know it at the time, my presence as a spectator of Balinese temple dramas was the first step along the way to my becoming part of the performance. I was perceived simply as a tourist, but the relationship between theatre and village life is so intimate that the mere presence of a Westerner is enough to change the quality of a performance. Comic allusions to tourists are often woven into the improvised dialogs. Sometimes a tourist character is burlesqued by one of the dancers wearing the mask of a grotesquely oversized wooden nose. Just as the hardships, love affairs, and ethical dilemmas of the local villagers find their way into the Balinese dramas, the bumbling tourists are also given their place.

Becoming a Student *(second and third months)*

As I became more involved in village life, my role in village performances increased proportionally. I moved from being a tourist to being a dance student. Made Djimat accepted me as he would have accepted a Balinese child who expressed sincere interest and respect for dance. He taught me with the same physical teaching methods that are used for all children in Bali. Early lessons consisted of my being grabbed from behind and moved through dance choreographies by having my limbs forcibly molded into the proper shapes. I was an awkward student, not nearly as supple as the Balinese children who know the movements before studying dance as a result of watching countless performances since infancy.

It would be difficult for a Western adult ever to master perfectly Balinese dance techniques. I certainly never even came close. When Djimat invited me to dance with him at an upcoming temple ceremony, I considered it an honor based not on my technical skills but on my relationship with Djimat, his family, and his musicians. After my lessons, I had often played with his children, teaching them how to float away on imaginary kite strings in mime. Djimat knew that I was a clown in my country. Though he was reluctant to teach me comic character movements, he enjoyed improvising comic walks and situations with me after our formal lessons were finished. His children would sit on the dusty ground in the family courtyard and watch our ridiculous antics with delight.

Evening music rehearsals provided another opportunity for me to become acquainted with the people of the village. Many of Djimat's neighbors played in his gamelan orchestra. Though Topeng performances are improvised, the music groups meet frequently to practice the basic rhythm patterns and melodies associated with each character. Actually the rehearsals are an excuse for gossip, drinking, and generally having a good time. Spirits are high and there is much joking.

In this situation I was again treated much the same as a Balinese child. My questions were not taken very seriously. I had not yet learned that few direct questions are ever answered seriously in Bali. Indirection, and especially indirection through laughter, are the accepted modes of transmitting important information. After a period of stupidly asking one blunt question after another I finally adopted the Balinese style of indirection and began developing my understanding of Topeng by listening to casual conversations and joking with the performers.

Anecdotes about local individuals shared at these informal rehearsals would often become part of the clowns' improvisations in the next temple drama. Spontaneous outbursts of comic dancing were also part of the evening sessions. Djimat could never resist the music's invitation to dance. One moment he would caricature a glutton, the next a vain woman. Again these were good-natured mockeries that might appear in a later performance as a form of moral lesson. "When the people laugh at something, they will not be so quick to do it themselves," was the way one dancer summarized the effects of the drama's satires on the village audience.

Becoming Masked *(fourth month)*

The first time that Djimat allowed me to dance at a rehearsal wearing one of his masks marked a turning point in my relationship with the musicians in his group. To wear a Topeng mask was not taken lightly. The masks are charged with the potency of the ancestral and divine archetypes they represent. Djimat's masks had belonged to his father. They were kept in a special place in the family temple where offerings were made to them every morning. I could rarely take any of them home to practice because Djimat's dreams were troubled when all the masks were not "sleeping together."

The night I was to dance the mask of the old man in rehearsal the musicians showed their support by joking with me more than usual. They told me I looked older. Feeling the soft wood against my face, I felt the responsibility of dancing with integrity to the spirit of the mask. There was also the responsibility of dancing with sensitivity to the music. The drummers would pick up any shifts of my movements and translate them into rhythm changes. I in turn responded to their tempo and mood. Everything was improvised around basic patterns of movement and melody. To make it work we had to become accustomed and responsive to each other's rhythms and stylistic idiosyncrasies.

The character of the old man suited me because it lent itself to comic digressions. The character is past his prime, infested with fleas, and barely able to lift himself out of his chair, but he is driven by a noble desire to dance with dignity in spite of his afflictions. I could rely on comedy and dramatic timing to overcome my weak movement technique. Dancing the mask that first night I remember feigning a near-fall and reaching out to the children's heads to regain my balance. They squealed while the musicians laughed and picked up my broken rhythms. When I took off the mask there were murmurs of approval laced with constructively critical suggestions. "Don't lift your legs so high," "Keep your elbows closer to your chest," etc. Djimat took the mask from me and placed its lips next to his ears as if he were listening. "I hear good things," he said. "Before I saw good things. Do it like that when the people are watching and seeing you will make them happy."

It had rained during the rehearsal. When it ended most of the men went out to the rice fields to catch eels. One of the older musicians who had never talked to me individually stayed to talk with me about my dance. Later Djimat took me to a corner of his courtyard where he was planning to build a new temple. He told me how excited he would be when it was finished and he could use it as a place to have dance performances. I could dance there too, he said. As he told me more of his plans for the space, he began dancing to show me what things would be like. He lifted up his sarong as if it were a Topeng costume, too carried away with his dreams to notice that he had on no underwear. He continued pounding out rhythms in the mud with his bare bottom shining in the moonlight until his wife walked by and laughingly swatted at him with her broom.

Personal moments like these were not irrelevant to learning about Balinese drama. Watching Djimat dance spontaneously or observing how respectfully he treated his masks taught me much about the connections between Balinese clowns and gods. Eventually I came to understand that many village conflicts are aired with comic perspective in the temple dramas. It was an important mechanism for restoring equilibrium to the community. In these informal rehearsals I was witnessing the rudimentary stages of this process. One evening the conversation turned to the wasteful inefficiency of government projects. Several weeks later a clown in performance joked, "The government big shots are not as smart as me. They need fancy stones and big machines to build a road. All I need is the ground under my feet."

Not only was I observing this process, but I found myself gradually becoming a part of it. After dancing the mask in rehearsal I found the men more responsive to me personally. I was invited to their homes. Stories that I told them began to appear as the basis of jokes in the performances I attended. Making jokes about me was their way of

including me in the performance, even when I was not performing. They made similar references to their families and friends. Now instead of being joked about as a tourist, I was being included in the performance on the same individual level of reference.

Becoming a Performer *(fifth and sixth months)*

When I had attended performances in which Djimat was dancing, I was always invited to eat with the musicians and dancers. When they finished eating and began to make preparations for the dance I had always excused myself to find a place in the audience. When I arrived with Djimat as a performer, the pattern changed. I stayed with him and the other dancers all through the pre-performance preparations.

There is no physical warm-up for the Balinese performer. The warm-up consists instead of a 2-4 hour period during which they acclimate themselves to the village, the temple, and their hosts. It is very much a social warm-up filled with gossip, joking and drinking. Only in the last few minutes before performance do the dancers become introspective as they make offerings to their gods and prepare themselves to receive the spirits of the masks they will perform.

When they perform in a village other than their home, the social warm-up gives the performers a chance to learn which topical issues are on the minds of their audience. These issues are woven into the improvised clown banterings, creating a bond of identification between the performers and their public. An equally strong bond is created between the performers and their gods by the religious rituals and offerings that immediately precede the dancing. Holy water is sprinkled over the masks and costumes as sacred mantras are murmured by the dancers.

Linked closely to both the spiritual and mundane worlds, the performers become a liaison between the everday life of the villagers and the divine potency of the gods. Jokes about commonplace human problems are made in the context of stories about mythic gods and heroes. Wearing half-masks that make them characters of both flesh and fantasy the Topeng clowns are the epitome of this blending of dimensions. They are in both worlds at once and shift easily from quoting ancient religious texts to recounting hilariously obscene jokes.

The performance becomes a vortex of history, myth, religion, morals, and topical events. To juggle these elements successfully in his improvisations is the goal of a good performer. It is especially important for the clowns. "We want to do more than just make people laugh. If a person doesn't understand the way of the gods, the laughter by itself is empty."

These obligations of the performer to his community and gods were clear to me before I danced with Djimat in the temples. I could think of little else during the eating, costuming, and offerings that preceded my first dance. Once I passed the threshold of the curtains, I concentrated only on bending my body to the power of the music, the audience, and the mask of the old man. Each of these elements is such a powerful performance force that the real skill of the dancer lies in how well he can sensitize his movements to their demands rather than in his individual virtuosity.

Making the mask come alive requires subtle control of neck muscle movements. The music dictates rhythms. And the audience participates in a myriad of unpredictable ways. During that first dance my performing space was invaded by a barking dog, a procession of chanting women, and a large duck. The duck was in the arms of an older woman who could not restrain it from voicing its cacophonous responses to my dance. I responded to its quacking with some duck-like movements of my own. The interaction between myself and the duck went on for several minutes and was probably the highlight of the performance.

Removing my mask behind the curtain I looked to it for some reassurance similar to the kind Djimat had heard in our rehearsal, but the spirit of the old man was in no mood to cater to my insecurities. I did get some smiling words of praise from an old man in the flesh who had enjoyed my dancing. I had noticed him before the performance inching his way to the temple courtyard with the help of a tall black cane. He told me that he had been a dancer in his youth, and his encouragement made me almost as happy as if the mask itself had spoken.

Becoming a Clown *(seventh, eighth, and ninth months)*

This first public performance marked another turning point in my relations with the people of Djimat's village. I became known to a wider circle of people. Women vendors in the marketplace would comment on my performance, and the prices I was charged began dropping.

The mask of the old man is a full mask that does not speak. Djimat invited me to dance it on several other occasions, and I expected it to be the only one I would ever dance in performance. One evening, though, in a particularly raucous drama Djimat surprised me by giving me one of his speaking clown masks and sending me out to improvise with the other clowns already out in front of the audience. If I had had time to consider the offer I probably would have refused, but carried away with the high energy of the performance I took the mask and came out bellowing.

At this point I should note that much of the effectiveness of Balinese clowns comes from their breaking the graceful rhythyms of song and movement established by the serious characters. I could never have been integrated into Balinese performance as a serious dancer, but with lack of grace as one of my specialties I was able to improvise that first and other speaking clown roles with much success. Supplementing my limited vocabulary with a series of well-timed expressive grunts I resorted to the simplest of slapstick techniques and was surprised to find the audience responding as if I had done something very clever.

The story was a complicated satire of Djimat's extramarital affairs in which he enjoyed the cathartic pleasure of murdering his lover and beating his wife. The performance took place in Djimat's family temple with his wife watching and the audience roaring with laughter at the thinly-veiled parodies. My character was a gruff-voiced buffoon who kept chasing Djimat around in circles asking him to explain himself. I was a cross between Caliban and the cookie monster. The voice I used was imitated frequently throughout the village over the next week.

Becoming a Keeper of Masks

Again in change in performance roles resulted in a new intimacy between myself and the villagers. People who had kept their distance because of my being a foreigner began to loosen up and talk with me more freely. An important change also resulted in my relationships with several maskmakers.

I had bought several masks when I first arrived in Bali, but they lacked life. They had been carved for tourist shops and looked good on the wall, but dancing with them in performance was impossible. When dancing in the temples I had borrowed Djimat's masks. Soon the maskmakers who had seen me perform or heard of me from their friends began carving masks especially for me.

When the carver knows that a mask will be performed in the temples, the time and craftmanship he devotes to its creation are increased considerably. As he works, the maskmaker considers the setting in which the mask will be used, the archetypal character it expresses, and the individual dancer who will perform it. I sat and talked

with several maskmakers and their families while my masks were being carved. Knowing me informally gave them a better sense of what kind of person would be dancing their creation, and resulted in slight changes of line and nuance during the process of the carving. One maskmaker made a special clown character for me based on his viewing of my comic improvisations. Usually the clown masks are variations on a stock set of characters, but this particular caricature of dull-witted laziness was created especially for me, a dubious honor which pleased me greatly.

Just as the maskmaker takes the dancer into consideration when he carves, the dancer is expected to think of the maskmaker before he dances. One carver likened the process of creating a masked character to the birth of a baby. The carver is the father who gives the mask (seed) to the dancer, who is the mother. The period of meditation during which the dancer studies the spirit and lines of the mask is analogous to the baby's time in the womb. A good dancer will try to develop a relationship with each mask that enables him to make his movements truly reflective of the character that the carver has etched into the wood. When a harmony is achieved between the physical features of the mask and the archetype it represents the dancer's movements will bring the mask to life, and he will be said to have "taksu." Without the bond of "taksu" between himself and the mask, the dancer's movements will be dead. These dancers without "taksu" are disparagingly called "carpenters," because they don't put a soul into their masks, they just push around the wood.

Becoming a Storymaker *(tenth month)*

By the time of my last performance I felt I had developed an intimate understanding of my masks. There were over a dozen that I had danced several times. I slept with them hung in a special place over my bed and had them blessed by temple priests along with the masks of Djimat. I had come to be especially fond of my frog mask and decided to make my last appearance in a story revolving around a heartbroken frog who is sad that he has to leave Bali.

Up until this last show I had sat in with the dancers as they orally outlined the scenarios for the dramas about fifteen minutes before each performance, but I had rarely made any suggestions of my own on how to adapt the plot to a particular audience. Knowing it would be my last performance with them, Djimat and the other dancers were receptive to my ideas of incorporating the frog into the story that night. As I sketched my ideas they began chuckling, realizing without my having to tell them that I was using the performance as a way of saying goodbye and thanking them for what they had taught me. After ten months I had finally learned the Balinese style of indirection.

The woman whose family I lived with had often joked with me about frogs. I knew she would be happy to hear that I was dancing the frog mask in my last performance. When I told her, she responded by asking who would dance the part of the frog's girlfriend. In the traditional Balinese frog story there is a princess who loves the frog, and my friend was disappointed that there were no plans in my performance for the frog to have a romance. As the performance was also a going away present for her and her family, I tried to please her by asking Djimat to dance the role of the frog's girlfriend in one of his comic female impersonation masks. He agreed, but one of the other dancers surprised me during the performance of my romantic frog scene with Djimat by coming out in another female mask and claiming to be my forgotten first wife from America.

There were other surprises during the performance. Djimat initiated a scene in which I was supposed to be his dance teacher, reversing our real-life roles and resulting in some very bizarre dances. A maskmaker from another village came to watch me dance one of his creations, so knowing it was his birthday I mentioned his name in a

joke. I also made fun of the woman who had cooked for me during most of my stay, including her in the performance as an expression of my appreciation.

The entire performance was laced with innuendo and comic references like these. The audience and the performers were part of each other's lives and their relationships were threaded into the fabric of the comedy. For the first time I was consciously helping to shape the Topeng drama into a form that included the people and things that were important to me. I even taught Djimat an old circus gag that the crowd enjoyed immensely.

All night the audience responded warmly as I hopped in the dust of the temple courtyard in my frog costume. When the frog began to cry that he would miss all the good friends and teachers he had loved so much in Bali, they all knew I was speaking about them. Formal handshakes and farewells would have meant nothing to them. But communicating through the mask of a giant green frog enabled me to express my feelings toward them in the context of a performance language that they understood perfectly.

I had passed through the roles of tourist, student, performer, and clown. Now I was a frog, a storyteller whose performance mirrored the complexities of all these roles. The Balinese audience comprehended and accepted these connections as they accept all links between performance and everyday life. They took no special notice. They simply drank their palm wine, ate their rice cakes, and laughed.

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Pak Rajeg's

Life in Art

by Fredrik deBoer

This is a brief account of the life thus far of I Nyoman Rajeg, a Balinese *dalang*, or shadow-puppeteer. Pak Rajeg, now in his early 60's, grew up and was educated under the Dutch regime, lived through the Japanese occupation, participated actively in the independence movement, and subsequently has lived through the rapid and deep changes brought on as Bali experiences modernization. And yet, for all the changes that have come to pass in his lifetime, Pak Rajeg lives a life in the traditional performing arts of his culture that is well-founded and (it would seem) secure, a life moreover that is integral with the main fabric of the society in which he lives.

Pak Rajeg is a professional *dalang*. He and his four musicians and two assistants form a small troupe that has its base of operations in his houseyard. From there they go forth to perform, usually in the nearby vicinity. The group gives performances of both the regular *wayang kulit*, with lamp and screen, which is done at night, primarily for purposes of entertainment. They also perform the ritual *wayang lemah*, or daytime *wayang*, which is given without screen or lamp—and for that matter, without audience as well. Pak Rajeg is a well-known exponent of the *wayang kulit*, and has been known and esteemed for decades in Bali, but especially since 1971, when he was among the winners in the first (and so far, only) all-Bali puppetry competition. A member of the older generation of *dalang* now practicing (although not one of the very oldest), Pak Rajeg is especially respected for the didactic qualities of his work and for the spiritual force it contains.

Rajeg was born in 1915 in the small agricultural community of Tunjuk, in the Tabanan region, where he still resides. The village of some one hundred families is located in good farming country about ten miles north of Tabanan city. It is a rather typical South Balinese village, extraordinary perhaps only for its high degree of community spirit and for the enthusiasm for the arts to be found there. Many of the inhabitants of Tunjuk trace their ancestry back to the village of Mas, located some forty kilometers or so to the east, which is where the origin-temple of Pak Rajeg's family, the *Bendesa Mas*, is located. Even before motor transportation was commonly available, Pak Rajeg and members of his family often made the difficult journey to Mas on foot to take part in various clan festivities and ceremonies. Thus the prevailing outlook in the family has not been narrowly local, and contact with performances given by groups from other villages has been a source of enrichment over the years.

In the early years of this century two *dalang* were active in the area of Tunjuk. Pak Rajeg's father, I Made Durya, while still young, revealed interest and talent in shadow-puppetry, and as many youngsters still do in Bali and Java today, he played often with toy *wayang* made from leaves. Apparently neither of the two old *dalang*, Nang Riman or Nang Suda, had offspring or younger nephews able to take up their profession, for I Made Durya became a *dalang* and was the first in his family to do so. With the encouragement of the *keraton*, or royal house, of Tabanan, which loaned him a set of puppets to use until he could acquire his own, Pak Rajeg's father became a busy and popular professional puppeteer. Young I Nyoman grew up in an environment in which the shadow-play, its music and stories were a continuously present everyday reality. From the age of eight, he began to follow his father nearly everywhere he performed, learning the basics of his future craft.

By that time he had already entered the village elementary school, where he learned to read and write the Balinese language and alphabet. His father hoped I Nyoman might achieve the security and prestige of a civil service appointment in the Dutch administration, and after showing good ability in the village school, the youngster was sent to the Dutch *Vervoleg*, or continuation, school, where he learned Malay and the use of Latin letters as well as junior high school subjects. He graduated in 1927, at the age of twelve. Urged to do so by his father, he spent a period of time in Tabanan city after graduating, and worked at a volunteer job in an office, hoping to get a start in the Civil Service. Opportunities were very limited, however, and after a few months he returned to his village, as he puts it, "to follow his talent." At that time he began to prepare in a more formal way to become a *dalang*.

His father recognized the inevitable and took an active role in the training of his son, who was the only youngster of his generation in Tunjuk to show interest and

potential for the profession. Young I Nyoman received encouragement on that account, for in a traditional Balinese village, the *dalang* is an important public servant as well as an entertainer. Every well-functioning *desa* needs easy access to a *dalang* for the holy water that he can make and for the ritual functions he serves. In fact these needs form the base of the pyramid of demand that keeps the shadow-puppet medium alive and comparatively healthy in contemporary Bali. It was therefore in the interest of the village as well as of the family that I Nyoman took up the profession of his father.

The foundation of his training was literary. Of all the island's many dramatic genres, the *wayang kulit* has the deepest and most extensive ties to the Balinese classical literature, which is written principally in the Old Javanese or Kawi language. The *dalang* brings the classics to life in his performances. In fact it is through the shadow-play that most Balinese who understand only a few words of Kawi learn the essentials of their literary heritage. The *dalang* must know the stories and characters from such semi-scriptural works as the Old Javanese *Ramayana*, the *Arjuna Wiwaha*, and others very thoroughly. He must be able to read from the old *lontar* manuscripts, for they are his sources. He must understand the philosophical, religious, and magical aspects of the tales. He must be able to improvise freely in Kawi, and to translate and interpret it. Far more than in the dance-dramas, where emphasis is equally on performance technique, the *dalang* has to be as much a scholar as performing virtuoso. Thus it was that I Nyoman devoted himself to mastery of Kawi and the classical literature when he returned to Tunjuk in 1927. He studied for four years.

Closely allied to literary studies, indeed inseparable from them in Balinese tradition, was the practice of singing. The Kawi classics, when read, are chanted. Thus, even as he worked to master the meaning of the old tales, he was starting to develop as a singer, learning the melodies associated with the ancient metrical forms, as well as the other, more secular, music specific to the *wayang*. Beating on the side of a box used to keep the implements for chewing *sirih*, he began also to learn the percussive patterns and signals given by the *dalang*'s toe-hammer or *capala*. And after several years, he studied the *gender wayang*, which is one of the most difficult and most beautiful of the Balinese musical instruments to play. Interestingly, his father recommended that he break off his study of *gender* after he had learned the basic *wayang*, repertory, feeling that the instrument might become a distraction from the more essential aspects of the puppeteer's craft if pursued to the advanced level.

It is also interesting to note that I Nyoman studied for four years before there was any question of working with the puppets themselves. And when, at the age of sixteen, he set up a little rehearsal stage, a "*Panggung Wayang*," with musical instruments, banana log, screen and lamp, it was a radical thing for him to do. For traditionally the sacred *wayang* puppets, with their special spiritual powers and ritual uses, were not to be used in rehearsal at all. The puppets were to be handled only after appropriate offerings had been presented, prayers made, and an entire ritual completed. Consequently, it seems to have been usual for an apprentice *dalang* to employ real puppets for the first time on the occasion of his first performance—no doubt a very high-stress situation for the young puppeteer.

But I Nyoman was coached in puppet manipulation by his father, who although trained himself in the older manner, used progressive ideas in training his son. Pak Durya would sit on the shadow side of the screen, criticizing and giving advice as the young *dalang* worked over and over again on the parts involving difficult movement, especially the dances and fight scenes.

The rehearsal stage was cleverly set up near a much-travelled path, and as the months went by I Nyoman could begin to judge his progress by feeling his growing power to hold the attention of the passers-by. In distinction from the practice prevailing

at the time, he did not learn the elaborate series of prescribed *mantra* and symbolic correspondences that are contained in the *dalang*'s code book, the so-called *Dharma Pewayangan*, until shortly before he was to make his actual debut. Traditionally, the *Dharma Pewayangan* would have been an aspiring *dalang*'s first subject of study.

Pak Rajeg's apprenticeship was completed in 1932, when he gave his first complete performance and underwent the prescribed "ordination" ceremony. Henceforth, he had the right to perform in public for a fee, to make holy water, and to perform the "*Ruwat*," or *wayang* of exorcism, by means of which the bad fortune of those born in certain unlucky circumstances can be removed or prevented. It was also in 1932 that Pak Rajeg married.

In the ten years or so following his debut, Pak Rajeg performed *wayang* occasionally, but in effect the *wayang* art was put to one side in his life. The reason was that his father was still actively performing, and as long as such was the case, the people who were to become his clientele did not care to call on the young man to perform. It is thought in Bali that there is a power, called "taksu," that runs in *dalang* families and that jumps from one generation to the following one at a particular time. Usually one person at a time in a family will have the *taksu* and with it the title and function of *dalang*. As with many Balinese customary practices, there are exceptions to this, as for example in the extraordinary village of Sukawati in Gianyar province, where eleven *dalang*, most of them close relatives, live and base their performing activities.

It was only when Pak Durya retired in the early years of the Second World War that Pak Rajeg became known by the title of *dalang*, a designation he has held ever since. Among his colleagues and others knowledgeable about the *wayang*, Pak Rajeg is not known by his given name but simply as "*Dalang Tunjuk*." And just as Pak Rajeg did not perform on a regular basis while his father was still professionally active, his son, although a very gifted young puppeteer, does not often perform the *wayang* in Bali.

So it transpired that Pak Rajeg turned to the study of dance and especially dance-drama during the ten years that followed his debut. He began to study almost by accident. Someone in his household was learning the leading role for a forthcoming production of *Arja*, a Balinese genre that is akin to opera in some respects. The unfortunate student was very slow to learn and Pak Rajeg criticized him, whereupon Pak Durya, perhaps intending to teach a lesson in humility, insisted that his son replace the one he criticized. The result, however, was that Pak Rajeg learned the role quickly and performed it with great success. Encouraged, he then began to study very seriously with Pak Ngurah Rai, of the nearby village of Marga, and in two years he had advanced so far as to be teaching *Baris*, *Jauk*, and other forms himself. Before the war he often went to Jembrana and Buleleng, far from his home, to give instruction. He also observed the work of other *dalang* during this time, especially those in the Mas area. He saw and was influenced by the work of I Nyoman Granyam of Sukawati, who was without question the most influential *dalang* of his time. Granyam's story remains to be told elsewhere, but it can be said that by introducing musical and dance-movement ideas from the *Kebyar* style of North Bali into the *wayang*, Granyam probably effected more change in the Balinese shadow-play in a decade than it had experienced for hundreds of years. Pak Rajeg's style of performance reflects the influence of Granyam and his followers, with its elaboration and intricate connection of movement and music, although his style is not disfigured by excessive ornamentation or overemphasis on technique.

Pak Rajeg's activities as a patriot and nationalist during and after World War II are outside the scope of this biography in the arts. However, his frame of reference has not been that of a simple villager who knows only the concerns of his own locality, but that of a modern citizen of Indonesia who is very much aware of the world outside Bali, reading the newspapers and listening to the news broadcasts. In his *wayang* performance he is

Puppeteer:
I Nyoman Rajeg

able to bring the archetypical situations from the traditional literature into vital relation to contemporary events and the timely concerns of his audience. In so doing, he continues to fulfill the *dalang*'s time-honored responsibilities as teacher and counselor of the populace.

Already in 1950 Pak Rajeg accepted his first student of *pedalangan*, as the performer's art is called, and since that time he has had a half-dozen or so others. His son, I Nyoman Sumandhi, has been an apt student and now is a teacher at Kokar-Bali, the government high school for the performing arts in Den Pasar, where he has taught the *wayang* course. Thus Pak Rajeg's father's ambition to have a *Pegawai Negri* in the family has been realized, if a generation later than he had hoped. Through contacts made by Sumandhi, who attended University of California in Los Angeles for three years, several Americans have come to be numbered among Pak Rajeg's students, including Larry Reed, who has performed often in this country, especially in California.

In addition to his work as *dalang*, Pak Rajeg holds a number of positions of influence and respect in his community, both formal and informal. He has been the *Pengurus Adat* for Tunjuk since 1962, and he is head of the arts section of *Lembaga Sosial Desa* for the larger "*Desa Dinas*," an administrative unit of which Tunjuk belongs.

With his broad background in Balinese theatre, Pak Rajeg has often been called upon to lead, teach, advise, and perform with local associations devoted to presenting and preserving traditional forms of Balinese dance-drama, such as *Arja*, *Wayang Wong* and *Topeng*. The government has encouraged such efforts, if only very modestly, but it

is clear that activity has increased markedly in the 1970's, in part as a result of this stimulus. Tunjuk has received attention for the excellence and vigor of its performing groups, especially in the aftermath of Pak Rajeg's achievement in the island-wide *wayang* competition. Since then, the village association devoted to singing and interpreting the Kawi classics has been revived under his guidance, and he leads a group devoted to the *Wayang Wong*, an old and semi-sacred dance genre. The contribution he has made to his community is already immense.

When I was last in Tunjuk, in the late Spring of 1975, I was able to attend a rehearsal Pak Rajeg conducted one evening in his houseyard. A group of local performers was learning a new scene in a dance-drama. Working completely from his own memory and without a scrap of paper anywhere in evidence, Pak gave each player his part. Melody, words, and movement were all given line-by-line, phrase-by-phrase to his players. The company included both experienced performers and very raw beginners. With patient good nature, the director demonstrated and explained, leading his players through their roles a little at a time. If a player required several repetitions before mastering the part, Pak Rajeg never showed the slightest impatience. In a few hours the scene had been learned completely, from scratch, and brought to a near-performance level. Any director, regardless of language barriers, could have understood clearly what was being done and would have found it an impressive display. He worked quickly, simply, and directly, from a position of great authority, but cheerfully and kindly. He is a plain, straightforward man without a noticeable trace of self-importance or professional jealousy.

His daily life varies a good deal according to season and the schedule of ceremonies and festivals. In the times of comparative calm, Pak Rajeg can relax and pursue his hobbies. Often when I was in the village, an informal group of the older men would gather to pass time together in Pak Rajeg's houseyard. Bapak himself would usually be puttering with something, repairing a puppet perhaps, or making a new one. There would be soft conversation, smoking of sweet clove cigarettes, and much chewing of *sirih*. It would frequently occur that someone would get down a *lontar* manuscript from its keeping place in the rafters of Pak's working and sleeping pavilion, and would read (that is, chant) aloud from it. Pak Rajeg would translate the Kawi and comment on it, perhaps explaining the meaning or making the description more vivid to enhance the effect. In the corner one of the younger musicians might be practicing on the *gamelan* kept in the house, working on a difficult passage in advance of the evening's rehearsal. And always there were children about, playing, or more often listening with lively interest to the elders discussing the Balinese classics. One of Pak's grandsons is already showing great interest in the *wayang*, and plays with toy puppets made from leaves, just as Pak Durya did sixty years or so ago. Perhaps the *taksu* will one day pass to him.

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Teatr Loh, Indonesia, 1977-8

by Julie Taymor

The People

The idea to develop Teatr Loh came after I had already lived in Indonesia two years. For many reasons I was dissatisfied with the process of developing my previous work, *Jalannya Salju*, in Java. My intention was to bring the best of my tradition with me in collaboration with artists here. Teatr Loh, by Indonesian standards, was a very small group. During the first few months we were five Balinese, one Sundanese, two East Javanese, a Central Javanese, a Frenchman and two Americans. A few of the people had worked with me on the previous production. Pak Tempo was a key figure in rounding up the other Balinese members. He is a fine topeng performer from Tampaksiring, who had toured to Europe and Shiraz. It was a surprise that he joined our group because he was in his 50's, and it meant leaving behind in the village his wife, six children and numerous grandchildren. He brought with him instead two young Balinese women dancers in their early twenties. Raka had already performed in Japan; Cepet had never seen the ocean. The other Balinese members included Putu, a male dancer in Pak Tempo's group, and Nyoman, a young farmer and fisherman from the village where we

were situated. Endo from West Java, and Minto and Bawong from East Java were dancers and musicians with both traditional and modern theatre experience. Margie, an American ballet and modern dancer, had also studied Javanese dance.

A French actor, Roland, I met two years before when he was living alone in a small hut in a coastal village of Bali. He had joined me in the Balinese production of *Jalannya Salju* and since then had been living in an even more remote village with the priest of the great death temple. Hadi, a Javanese filmmaker and photographer, was our manager. The fact that he is Indonesian and male helped balance my role as director.

The obvious obstacles I encountered as director were: language—we had to use Indonesian as a common language even though for the Balinese and Javanese it was also not their first tongue; my gender—women leaders are very few, especially in the arts; my age—I was one of the younger members of my group whose ages ranged from nineteen to fifty two; and my race and nationality—being a "white boss" is a stigma in a once colonized country. Also our differences of experiences, ways of thinking, ideals and philosophies were difficult to overcome. Not just east and west but also Javanese versus Balinese, traditional villager versus modernized Indonesian.

Cepet had never seen a movie, but she had seen demons. Pak Tempo's education stopped at grade six but he spoke Kawi, the ancient Javanese sanskrit, and could tell us Hindu legends for hours and days. I had hoped to have more women in the group, especially older ones, but it was impossible to find them. They work too hard in Bali, harder than the men.

The Place: Establishing Ourselves

I chose Bali because of the vitality of the arts there. The place we chose to live in, Peti Tenget (Sacred Box), is a small underpopulated coastal village that allowed us space and freedom to work. A hazard was that one of the five great sacred death temples of Bali was situated in front of our house and the entire area was considered to be *kramat* (heavy spiritual center). Many Balinese refuse even to visit the place for fear of the spirit. As soon as the entire group had assembled we made a *selamatan* (a purification-ceremony) with the assistance of the local priest. This is a usual practice for people embarking on a new project or entering a new space.

I'm not so sure I would choose to live and work in Peti Tenget again. We had earthquakes and floods. During the rainy season the ocean rose and in one day ate away the foundations of one of our houses. It toppled and left the ten of us to sleep in four small rooms for the rest of our time there. During the month of March a naked dead man with his eyes missing floated up on our beach. Raka and Pak Tempo had malaria. A number of us had an excess of various accidents. But we continued to work there because we had begun. Everyday, as the sun set, Raka and Cepet would make offerings in the house temple.

Because the Balinese felt they were "out" of Bali in some respects, the women lost their embarrassment when trying work. It was a long process but Pak Tempo himself encouraged them. The shopping and cooking presented the first problem. Men rarely do the cooking and dishwashing in Indonesia so at first (before we made a schedule) the women automatically did all the work. Because they were also involved in rehearsals the whole day, by 9 p.m. they were exhausted and incapable of participating in our late night discussions. The men did all the talking while the women listened. This attitude was challenged in our first weeks together. Everyone agreed to share the responsibilities equally.

Training

We began with traditional dance classes. Pak Tempo taught topeng and singing. Endo taught Sundanese dance and music. We learned the traditional dance styles to gain a wider range of movement vocabulary, as well as to understand the forms. Balinese, Javanese, and Sundanese dance are very different and for a Balinese to try and move his legs in Javanese style with the slow rhythm is not easy. Also it was the first time that Balinese women were allowed to perform topeng. The most difficult aspect for them was not the technical movements but the willingness to embody the male expression in the mask.

A constant frustration in our work was the *malu* (embarrassment) of the Indonesian women. It is one word that is on the tongues of every young Balinese woman. It is the excuse for not doing anything, and is what keeps their true nature from emerging. In Indonesia characters are divided into two main categories: *halus* (refined) and *kasar* (crude). I remember at one point in the rehearsals for *Jalannya Salju* one of my actors told me that I was not a *halus* woman. I answered him that if I were to behave in *halus* manner I would not be directing him at that moment. I said there are appropriate times to be *halus* and times to be *kasar*, and a woman should not be labeled *kasar* if she is asserting or expressing herself. I must admit I had to control myself when I hear statements such as "black magic is associated with women because women are connected with the negative and black elements in nature." As a foreigner I was cautious about how far I should go with my own ways and ideas. At Peti Tenget my principles were often pushed to their breaking point : principles of working, discipline, ideals, goals and "truth." I had to adapt and it was painful. But so did the others. It is interesting to see on what matters people are able and willing to change.

Traditional dance classes were given every morning six days a week. Except for Roland the people were enthusiastic about the classes. His shoulders were always aching and he couldn't understand the point of studying a ready-made form. He was only interested in improvisation. He complained he felt like a puppet being pushed and pulled into unnatural positions. He stopped taking the classes. Pak Tempo maintained that form comes first. A dancer must learn the technique, absorb the structure before he or she can fill it. A good Balinese dancer will take years before he is able to *menjiwai* (to embody with spirit) the part he is playing. In fact once the technique is mastered and a performer is able to begin to fill the form he may completely forget the studied design. He is free to improvise with the elements because he has already absorbed the whole. At that point individual genius emerges.

Pak Tempo's teaching methods evolved as he learned other modes of teaching. Instead of just having us imitate his movements he began to analyze each movement, to describe the dynamic changes and the subtle details in order that we would perceive the dance more deeply.

Every morning we would begin work with Tai chi chuan. We studied Tai chi because of its slow rhythm, fluidity and emphasis on balance and control. The Balinese dancers are prone to make short quick sharp movements. To perform Tai chi without punctuating each step was a challenge. To move the body as a whole rather than separately moving each part also proved difficult.

In addition to dance and Tai chi classes I led evening sessions in mime, improvisation, and maskmaking.

We also used an hour-long physical and vocal warm-up. Many of the movements came from yoga and exercises I collected during my theatre work in the West. Relaxation, flexibility and versatility were the objectives. At first Pak Tempo, because of his age and training, could hardly bend his back. To make himself into a ball, or make the plough of yoga was sheer torture. Work on the floor was something new for the Indonesians as they rarely perform in any but a standing position. Dizziness was a constant fear and complaint in the beginning. From the work on the floor—the cat and various stretching exercises—we moved to plastiques and isolation exercises. Starting with the head we would move each part of the body independently: head, facial mask, eyes, shoulders, chest, hips, legs, feet, arms, hands, and fingers. These exercises came easily to the Indonesians who use isolated gestures in their dances. A direct extension of the isolation exercises was what we called Dialog-Plastique. Using the isolated movements and no sound, two persons improvised a dialog in the space. A relationship between the two developed and then a third person would be introduced. A times we would create dialogs based on Balinese and Javanese gestures.

Stretching the facial mask

The vocal warm-up was something new for most of the members. Though the traditional performers could make wonderful sounds they were unaware of breathing and vocal techniques. Pak Tempo, whose throat is permanently distended from his classical training, explained to us how a young *dalang* (storyteller) is trained. He stands below a waterfall and screams to keep the water from entering his throat. We used both individual and group sound exercises:

> *1. Each member was asked to sing a symphony by moving the voice from one resonator to another, changing the rhythm and the dynamic of the sounds.*
>
> *2. We imitated sounds around us: animals, the elements, musical instruments etc. . . . Once these sounds could be produced by the voice alone we sought for a metaphorical association to the sound. For example, a pot of water coming to a boil is a stuttering man becoming angry.*

3. Words as sounds: the meaning of each word should be apparent by the quality of sound.

4. Imitating each other's sounds.

5. Passing a note from one person to the next as if it were one continuous sound with no breaks.

6. Breaking a sentence down by syllables and then passing the sentence around the group without losing its unity. This exercise was a model for later chorus work.

7. One person would hold a note while the next person entered on that same note improvised around it. After a few seconds the second person would freeze on a new note, a third person would enter on that note and begin to improvise. The result was a constant drone which changed keys. The purpose was to encourage a sensitivity to tonal scales, disonance, harmony, and breath control. We used this later in the storytelling section of Tiral *where the telling is passed from one person to the next.*

8. Rhythm and dynamics. Our first work was based on the Balinese Kechak. *We used vocal sounds, words, and musical instruments. The point was to create a rich syncopated unity. This came easily to the group because of their background in gamelan music. The problem arose when we would try to break out of a uniform rhythm, or try to alter the dynamics and create a jazz effect.*

9. When we began work on "how to tell a story" we paid attention to the traditional art of the dalang. *Bawong and Pak Tempo were especially proficient in the Javanese and Balinese styles. The Balinese* dalang *jumps up and down the scale while the Javanese is more monotone and contained. We would take a passage from a story and tell it in these different styles, and then create our own styles.*

Roland's Sessions

Roland wanted to lead sessions in Western-style improvisation. He began by emphasizing the importance of breath. Everyone was to start laughing, a simple request that resulted in roars of laughter. Then were asked to cry. More difficult. But Cepet let go. She wailed beyond control while her face was streaming with tears. She was in trance and could not be stopped. Roland comforted her and she slowly came out of it.

Roland sometimes set up a relationship between two characters that in any usual western improvisation would result in a violent splurge of histrionics. But when the Indonesians performed the scenes they were completely calm and unrevealing. Roland kept pushing the actors to "realize and feel" the crisis entangling them but his effort was useless. The result was a stiff Hollywood sentimentalization, totally unrelated to the reality of the Indonesian temperament and taste.

During one session Roland took everyone on a long "trip" involving a keen awareness of the senses. At the climax of the improvisation he asked everyone to imagine that they were making love with the floor. I was watching as the rest of the group lay silently immobile on the cold damp cement floor. Everyone, but Hadi and myself, very respectfully followed the directions given them. Hadi was disgusted and infuriated but he contained himself till the session was almost over. Then he broke in and commanded Roland to stop. The others dispersed as Hadi, Roland and I confronted each other. Roland had failed to realize that at least two of our members did not know what it felt like to make love and that a number of others felt no "motivation" to make love with the hard and unresponsive floor.

Improvisations

To Tell a Story

Before knowing what exactly the story was we'd later use we experimented with many different methods to tell any story. One technique was to take a traditional tale, common to all in the group, and to tell it from each character's point of view. For example, we took an episode of the Ramayana and retold it from Sita's perspective. A very new story with new questions emerged. The women in the group were particularly attracted to this way of viewing the traditional stories because most of the stories are told from the viewpoint of males. Other approaches to telling a tale were through dance, pantomime, story-theatre (which is equivalent to the Indonesian dalang method), singing circles and ideographs.

One technique we developed in order to invent a tale was to have one person assume a character and start to tell a story. After a few sentences the next person would take on the same character and continue to develop the story. It would go on around the circle. People would begin to enact what they were telling and the rest of the group would respond. We found this method to be helpful in character study as well as a wonderful device to involve an audience. More than once we would invite outsiders to join our tale-telling circle.

***Puppets from* Jalannya Salju**

Tirai: *The Growth of a Play*

While *Jalannya Salju* was designed from images I had seen, *Tirai* was based on specific persons and incidents I had experienced. *Tirai* was not to be a puppet play. The actors were of prime importance and I expected them to be creative participants in the theme's development. Some of the villagers were completely confused by this approach. The essential theme to be developed was "Boundaries and Limitations"; land boundaries, cultural differences, taboo, personal limitations, the "pressure point," the "boiling point" (the volcano before erupting; controlled anger and controlled desire), the life limit (what is the actual point of death).

Other themes we explored were sacrifice, offerings, fear (demons and witches), magic, trance and madness. As far as possible our research began with the traditional Indonesian philosophies and practices. Pak Tempo was a rich source. He kept everyone awake at nights with a vivid interpretation of Rangda (the Indonesian kali) and Leyaks (the Balinese witches). Endo, Hadi and Bawong enacted their image of the famous

Javanese witches and demons. Other nights Minto and Bambang engaged the group in East Javanese seances with the dead. We had discussions of black magic and almost every member could tell of a personal experience or one of someone close to him. But we were after not only the traditional forms of fear but also personal visualizations. It was much more difficult to enact an image of one's own fear. Our research led to a discussion of the differences between fears in different cultures. Cepet, during one session broke into tears upon remembering the fear of her childhood. She envisioned her demon as hunger. In dealing with offering and sacrifice the cockfight was used in many different forms. Each image was recorded to be later used in writing the script. After four months of research I began ordering the scenes and developing the story. The making of the script took the next four or five months. Everyone was involved in making the masks, costumes, musical instruments and properties.

Masks, Costumes, and Properties

We started with the basic life mask. Each member of Teatr Loh would go through the experience of being buried in plaster. From the positive casts of their faces, I made the white full masks used in the ceremonial walking and praying scenes of the play. Then the casts were used as a model for the comic half masks. The third type of masks created were those of a supernatural family; the demons of the wind and the volcano.

The costumes were designed for touring but I insisted upon high quality craftsmanship. Pak Tempo and his daughter, Wati, are each experienced costumers. Yet when I designed costumes that took a couple of days to complete the members could not understand. I said that the costumes for Barong cost a fortune and took months to make so why should modern theatre in Indonesia mean "cheap, quick and disposable"?

[Another example: the headpiece for Cepet required cambodya flowers. These particular flowers have a special significance for the Javanese and Balinese. When I made the requests that we use fresh flowers for each performance a number of people seemed shocked. Why not just use plastic flowers? Even the Balinese were uninterested to search for the live flowers in each city of our tour. But if they were to present a traditional performance there would be no doubt that fresh flowers would be used. They wouldn't dream of settling for plastic.]

The setting was simple. We carried with us three bamboo frames of different sizes and various curtains. These frames functioned as doors, barriers and scenery. The large center frame had a curtain tapestry of a large combodia tree and one of a volcano. The idea for the standing curtain came from the Balinese topeng theatre. Each character shakes the curtain before emerging from it. In *Tirai* we used three curtains: the traditional family always emerged from the right curtain, the two travelers emerged from the left curtain and all strange things came from the center curtain.

Rehearsing the Play

The Indonesian language is not the first tongue of most Indonesians. In fact their local dialects are much more sophisticated and musical. But because our plan was to tour throughout Indonesia we decided to use the national language for most of the dialog in the play. Other languages used were English, German, Kawi (ancient Javanese sanskrit) and Bahasa Bludak-uwak-uwak (our new language based on Javanese and Balinese). The Balinese in the group had never acted in Indonesian before. When I first gave them part of the script they could hardly read it, even though I had written it based on their improvisations. Memorizing was also a new difficult task for them as all of the traditional dramas are improvised without script.

We used the various traditional singing storytelling and chanting styles in our performance. The Indonesian language was stretched into colorful and dramatic areas by the performers. Our intention was not to make a pastiche of every kind of traditional style but to allow the performers to bring their own way and ability into discovering how to present their part. The same with movement. Certain scenes I choreographed, especially those with the white life masks because the masks themselves designated the type of movement. But in other parts of the play the performers created their own movement. It was never strictly traditional for that would be in appropriate. The music was developed in much the same way.

During the many months of rehearsals a few members of Teatr Loh left. Putu, very early on, was called back to his village to become a family priest. Roland left the group midway. He could not adapt to the discipline and ideas of the group. It took us more than a month to find a replacement for Roland: Fred, a West German. As soon as Fred arrived Pak Tempo disappeared. He had gone home to Tampaksiring to rest from ill health and he never came back to Peti Tenget. We waited a week and then went looking for him. It turned out that the local government had taken Pak Tempo to direct the big Gong Festival coming up the next month. Though he had explained his commitment to Teatr Loh it made no difference. Teatr Loh is "foreign" (Javanese and Western) and Pak

Tempo is a Balinese with an obligation to Bali. We felt it unwise to push for his return. We postponed our performance one and half months. Finally Pak Tempo returned, rehearsals grew long and intense, and we were ready to tour.

The Tour

Before departing the Balinese spent three days in nine different temples to pray for our journey. We were awaiting the governmental permission for Fred and me, as foreigners, to perform. This was the first time that foreigners had been involved in a theatre project from within the country. The officials, confused as to the right decision, were taking more than three months to answer us. We couldn't wait any longer. On the evening of April 25 we took the night bus from Bali to Java, heading to Surabaya. As soon as our bus had unloaded from the ferry and had been on the island of Java not more than fifteen minutes, we crashed. The sleeping driver of a large truck rammed head on into us. He died. We were in on unbelievable state. (Cepet's leg broken, my chin and lip carved in two, Hadi's back broken and so on). Our tour had begun and finished. Or so we thought. After recuperation in the hospital the members decided that we should rest for a month and resume the tour in June. During the hiatus Hadi went to Tampaksining to check on the Balinese. Pak Tempo's daughter, Wati, took Cepet's place. A special ceremony was held in order for the tour to continue. The priest gave the group holy water which was to be administered to each actor before every performance. (During the following two-month tour, once the costumes were on, the group would gather for a silent moment to receive the blessing.)

In June we opened in Malang, East Java. In addition to performances we gave three and four day workshops in some of the cities. These were always well attended by thirty or forty young participants. Our tour covered all of Java, part of Sumatra and Bali; a distance of more than two thousand kilometers.

Over the two months we played to at least ten thousand people: villagers, university students, intellectuals, artists and children. In each town the audience reacted differently. some were simply overwhelmed by the newness of the performance, the visuals, and paid little attention to the content of the play. Others were caught up in the meaning of the story. And others were fascinated with the form of theatre. The play was designed,in fact, to be appreciated on many different levels. As with traditional theatre, we hoped that if an audience could not follow every abstract symbol or idea in the play, they would at least be entertained by it. After our performances in Malang, Jember and Yogyakarta, the audience asked to have a discussion period that would sometimes last for two hours. Often the questions were very good and sometimes they revealed a certain local prejudice or way of thinking.

It was interesting to compare the reactions of the different audiences. The East Javanese for example, found it necessary to point out the fact that the play had more of a Balinese color to it. Some people found it annoying to listen to the Balinese way of speaking Indonesian. Also a number of people found it necessary to try and identify each of the different kinds of movement, music, and singing styles. In Jakarta, Bandung and other cities, where the audiences are already satiated with traditional theatre from all over Indonesia, they were able to see *Tirai* as a whole. Audiences appreciated the flexible use of the Indonesian language and were not caught up in trying to identify each movement. The story could take place anywhere. It's amusing that the Javanese thought the play to be about Bali, the Balinese thought the play to be Javanese, the Sumatrans thought the play to be about somewhere else, and the Westerners thought the play to be about Indonesia as a universal model for other cultures.

Our last performance, in Bali, was a surprise for us. The Head of the Arts Center in Den Pasar had invited artists and students from different villages to come. The performance was outside, free, and packed. Never had I felt such an attentive group in Bali before. They rarely have the opportunity to see anything from outside so they were most appreciative. The second night we performed some of the same people came again and had already memorized some of the lines and actions of the play. They weren't inhibited to shout out the lines simultaneously with the actors, or to inform the other members of the audience what might come next. The hazard of playing in Bali with a fixed script.

Opening scene of Tirai

TIRAI

As an Indonesian family of traditional mask performers makes its way to a cremation rite they encounter a pair of western travelers. Some of the characters attempt to enter the other culture.

Part I: While Traveling To. . .

A curtain shakes and opens. A family of seven masked travelers appear slowly making their way to a distant ceremony. On their heads they carry their world: fire, flowers, a tree, a table of rice fields, a pig, babies and musical instruments.

Another curtain shakes; it cannot be opened. It is ripped apart and two western strangers, a man and a woman, appear, lost. They also wish to visit the ceremony.

Part II: I Saw A. . .

A third curtain shakes and opens. A cambodya-tree appears. The family members ceremoniously remove their masks and objects from their heads. The father and leader of the group informs them that they must rehearse a play for tomorrow's wedding-day ceremony.

The play will be *The Emperor's New Clothes*. During the scene that follows, the characters of the individuals and their interrelationships emerge, as does the theme of the play within the play. Before night falls the family finds a safer place to sleep. It is taboo to sleep in a graveyard.

A dream sequence follows: The two strangers, unafraid and unknowing, fall asleep under the tree. A magic storm separates them. The man, following his demon, steals the family's fire and sets all of the trees on fire. He is after the secrets of the "ancient way."

The family's son is drawn to the lone sleeping woman. Upon touching her she transforms into the witch of his greatest fears: Rangda/kali.

The family looks for their stolen fire and lost son. They are shocked to discover the foreign couple. Fear and hostility overwhelm the meeting.

It rains. The family resumes their journey. The strangers follow, invited yet uninvited.

Part III: They Offered Us. . .

They arrived at their destination. A volcano looms in the background. Be-

fore the mask play begins the uncle, a traditionalist most wary of the two strangers, approaches them and asks to borrow their faces. The comedy begins. Briefly the tale is about a vain king who is always demanding new and more beautiful clothing. Two weavers from a distant land arrive and claim to be able to satisfy the king's wishes. (The weavers were wearing the masks of the two strangers which were borrowed by the uncle.) All of the ministers and the queen are fooled by the cleverness of the weavers. At the end of the play the king is paraded half-naked through the streets of his kingdom.

Only when one small boy cries "the king is naked" does everyone finally realize that they have been fooled by the weavers who have now disappeared.

Though the comedy should be over at this point, the two strangers, who up till this time have been an audience, are accused of being the weavers. A trial ensues. The son defends their innocence and is accused of being a traitor. The two strangers are "exiled." Before they leave they watch as the son is forced to wear a pig mask and to enter a trance, prodded by members of the family. After wildly attacking them, he rushes into the forest followed by the woman stranger.

A dance begins, and then another trance dance. The male stranger also wishes to go into a trance and grabs a *Keris* (dagger) from the hands of the uncle. The family is shocked and angry when he begins to stab himself as if in trance. The son rushes to try and stop him. The stranger is dead.

Part IV: It Was a Feast Of. . .

The volcano begins to erupt. The family starts to accuse one another of the death of the stranger. The dead man rises. In an effort to be the sacrifice he rushes to the mountain forcing it to accept him. When the family realizes that the offering is unacceptable to the volcano, they place the white masks on their faces. With that protection, they silently wait. The woman stranger and the son together climb the volcano.

Seraikella Chhau

Talking to Guru Kedar Nath Sahoo

by Suresh Awasthi

SAHOO: I am now sixty years old; I started dancing at the age of four. I belong to the tradition. My father and grandfather were dancers. I belong to the Kansari caste, which is engaged in the practice of these dances; its main vocation is the making of household utensils. My family also made works of art in gold and other material. In our country often a particular caste or community is involved in the practice of a particular craft or a form of dance and theatre. Arts are community based and family based. The techniques are passed from father to son, from one generation to the other. Since the transmission of the techniques is oral, this pattern works more effectively than any other.

AWASTHI: We know from the experience of the last four decades that institutionalized training in the field of music and dance replacing the guru-pupil tradition has not succeeded. How is it that you have not trained any of your sons in Chhau dance?

SAHOO: It is a very delicate and complex question, and I really do not have a satisfactory answer. I wanted to give them formal education. I also wanted them to work in the fields: I own some land. And finally, with my own experience, I was uncertain about their future as dancers—I mean financially. It is too late now; they are grown up. It hurts me deep within. Fortunately, one of my sons has learned the craft of making headgears, and the youngest one has learned dance. But this is really not my fault. The problem has social dimensions. Society has to determine the place of arts, especially arts like these traditional dances that have survived for all these centuries as part of rituals and religious life, and for some decades with feudal, princely patronage. Now there is no princely patronage and rituals are losing hold on our lives. Also, dancing only once in a year in April as part of spring celebrations is not enough to sustain the dances and the dancers.

AWASTHI: You have made some very significant observations, which really apply to many of our traditional dance and theatre forms. For their survival and for their playing a fuller cultural role in society, they should be taken out of their ritual context and presented as artistic events in theatres. Fortunately this process has started; but it is slow. In the last fifty years Seraikella Chhau dances have been presented only half a dozen times outside the region. I will return to this question of promotion later. I would like you to complete the account of your early life as a dancer.

SAHOO: It was at the age of four that while doing the role of child Krishna in a traditional Jatra play, I was chosen by the royal family to be attached to the palace to be trained as a Chhau dancer. At that time several members of the royal family were engaged in the practice of dance. Some of them were very fine dancers; they also choreographed new numbers. They were enthusiastic patrons of the arts. Maharaja Aditya Pratap Singh Deo took a very keen interest in the dance, and helped in the conception and design of the masks; and often sat for hours giving them finishing touches. His brother Bejou Pratap Singh Deo, who was my guru, was a very imaginative choreographer. Most of the Chhau dance numbers are his creation. It was he who took a troup of dancers in 1936 to give performances outside Seraikella for the first time, in cities like Calcutta and Bombay. It was during this period that the Father of the Nation, Mahatma Gandhi, and the great poet, Rabindranath Tagore, saw these dances, and were impressed by their grace and poetic charm. Encouraged by the response B.P. Singh Deo took a troupe to Europe in 1937. Foreign audiences greatly acclaimed these dances.

In the royal family, Prince Suvendra was a brilliant dancer; I often danced with him taking female roles. Radha-Krishna, Nabik (Boatman and his wife), Chandrabhaga (the legend of Sun falling in love with the maiden Chandrabhaga) and Kacha-Devayani (a legend of intense love) were some of our duets that became very popular. As a young dancer, I specialized in dancing female roles. I also danced solo numbers. I was very good in dancing Ardhanarishwar. This is a very important number in the repertory of Chhau dances. It depicts the composite form of Shiva and Shakti. In this dance the mask, one half denoting Shiva and the other half Shakti, plays a most fascinating part in determining the nature of movements. Other solo dances that I danced were Mayur (peacock) and Sagar (Ocean).

Boatman and his wife

AWASTHI: The role of the mask is very vital in Chhau dances. Tell me more about your performing career. You told me that at the age of four you were chosen to be attached to the palace. What does this mean? Was there a full-fledged professional troupe maintained by the palace? What was the nature of employment and support?

SAHOO: There was no permanent, professional troupe maintained by the palace, and the dancers did not receive any salary. It was a very indirect patronage; 15 to 20 dancers were "attached" to the palace. They were to dance during the annual dance festival as part of the spring celebration. They received training and practiced for a few months before the festival. The dancers were given food and clothing by the palace. Palace dance activity was in a sense an extension of the community activity. In Seraikella, there are eight Akharas (literally wrestling arenas), organized groups, of dancers. These groups operate on the basis of locality such as, Bajar Sahi, or by caste, such as Brahman Sahi. All these Akharas or groups dance during the annual festival. There are many dancers associated with each Akhara, so it is a broad-based communal art activity. Dance activity organized and promoted by the palace was, as I said, an extension of communal activity.

AWASTHI: I always thought that these highly evolved traditional dances had a very broad popular base. They are danced in many villages all over the region. They are also danced now by and for the industrial laborers, since you have a steel plant in your region. I find this phenomenon very interesting: Technology and industry exist in the framework of traditional culture. In the history of princely and feudal patronage of the arts in India, the support for popular and traditional arts like Chhau is very special. Generally, patronage was given to the classical arts. What happened to the dances within the palace? This situation must have had a great influence on these traditional dances. You are in the best position to talk about this phenomenon. You originally belonged to the tradition and the community, you worked for many years within the palace, and now again, leaving the palace, you have returned to the community, completing the circle.

SAHOO: Royal support imparted a sense of dignity and respect to the dance. It also helped in strengthening the tradition. Artistically it led to the refinement and sophistication of the techniques, mask and costume. It also encouraged the creation of new dances. But the palace dance activity was never isolated from the community activity; a link always remained. All the local groups (Akharas) performed during the annual celebration. And performances were held in the palace courtyard. That was one occasion when the palace gates were opened to the common people. Also, as I said earlier, the fact that the members of the royal family were practicing dancers meant a lot. In that way, it was a very different kind of patronage.

AWASTHI: I remember having met the late Maharaja Aditya Pratap Singh in 1967 when I attended the annual dance festival. I talked to him about the nature and origin of these dances. All the time he emphasized that the dances belonged to the classical tradition, and seemed to deny their popular base. We all know that the Chhau dances have a popular base, and that they are not the creation of the palace. Their origin, dance vocabulary, sources of imagery and technical terminology all have a popular base. If we examine them from the criteria of classical dance, we find that the Sahitya (poetic text) plays no role. Also there is no word-gesture relationship, an essential feature of classical dances. Traditional songs and medieval Oriya poetic compositions form the basis for the melodies played with the dances; there is no vocal accompaniment.

SAHOO: I agree with you about the popular base of the Chhau dances. The dances have evolved from the parikhanda (Pari-shield, Khanda-sword) exercises, and have martial origin. In course of time there was a great stylization of the movements. Gradual refinement of the mask also played a vital role in determining the character of the dances. Mythological themes of love, revenge, curse and blessing intensified the movements. Rituals preceding the dance, also played a part. But even while agreeing with you about their popular base and martial origin, I do not consider them folk dances. They have a highly evolved and codified technique that can be used for composing new dance numbers. Most of the repertory has been built up during the last 50-60 years. Some of them have complex choreography.

AWASTHI: I agree with you that the Chhau dances cannot be classified as folk dances. In fact they present a serious problem of classification. They represent a most interesting folk-classical continuum, a beautiful blend of folk, tribal and classical elements. This is a fascinating phenomenon of our arts. Folk and classical forms are not rigidly separated. The forms have an open structure, and facilitate mutual exchanges and influences of themes, techniques and conventions. In the seminar on Mayurbhanja

(Orissa) Chhau dances held in the last week of December 1978 at Bhubneswar, this fact was very clearly demonstrated. We could see that in the items such as Tamudia Krishna and Kiratarjun, there are small units of movements which have been taken from the Santhal Tribal dances, and beautifully incorporated as embellishment in the dance structure, which is predominantly built on the basic vocabulary of military drill. In fact, Kiratarjun is a very important dance of the Santhals, and has a most dramatic structure.

SAHOO: There is no such close link between the Seraikella Chhau dances and the folk and tribal dances of the region. In our dances, because of the use of the mask, there are very few group-dances. Also the sophisticated mask could not take folk and tribal dance movements in the otherwise highly stylized dance structure. As I said earlier, most of the dance numbers have been choreographed, and in this process the nature of the theme and conception of the mask played a crucial role in expanding the basic dance vocabulary based on military drill.

AWASTHI: I would like to return to the subject of the martial origin of the dances. This seems to me to be the most fascinating aspect of these dances; it vitally determines their structure and style. It is interesting to note that in Mayurbhanja in the early stages of its evolution Chhau dance was simply called "Parikhanda-Khela," the play of shield and sword. One version of this dance was even known as Chhau-Juddha (Chhau combat) in one area. Also, the earliest dance number was called Ruk-Mar, defense and attack. It was this dance that was developed into a war dance with real swords and shields, presented before the King of England when he visited Calcutta in 1911.

This is, in fact, an Asian phenomenon. Many forms of dance and theatre in Southeast Asia, Japan and China are inspired and influenced by martial arts. Kathakali of Kerala has taken the whole system of massage and certain aspects of training and movement technique from Kalari, the art of fighting of the region. Kabuki of Japan is also influenced by martial arts, and so is Peking Opera. Parikhanda exercises as the basis for the dance vocabulary, the dancer's stance of challenge, and the sequences of combat all emphasize the martial spirit of these dances. This spirit is further enriched by the common theme of conflict between the forces of good and evil. This theme follows a pattern in structuring the dance, especially Chhau dances of Purulia. The dance begins with an attitude of confrontation, leading to challenge, combat, and finally killing and dying. These four phases of the dance greatly influence the choreographic structure,which is constantly sustained and strengthened by the musical structure.

Both in your region and also in Mayurbhanja there has been an old tradition of Paikas, the village warriors. If we go back in history we find that there has been a flourishing martial tradition in this region. The sculptural tradition reinforces this fact. We find depiction of war scenes in many of the reliefs ranging from the Khandagiri and Udayagiri caves (second century B.C.) to many temples in Bhubaneswar from the tenth to fifteenth century.

SAHOO: I fully agree with your views about the origin and the role of martial arts in the development of Chhau dances. The Paikas served as a security force and imparted training in sword fighting to the village men. It is this tradition of Paikas that was gradually transformed and taken over by the dancers. Even today we practice dances with sword and shield in our hands in front of the Shiva temple. The basic posture and the position of the hand always give one the impression of holding a sword and shield. It is because of this that the Chhau dances are totally devoid of hand gestures. For expressing various sentiments like love, fear, anger and pathos we use our entire body. This, of course, is also because of the use of mask, which denies the use of the face to the dancer. If we study the growth of the Chhau repertory we will find that the early

dance numbers like Sabar (Hunter) and Astradand (Sword Play) were very close to the martial movements. The entire process of transformation and stylization of these movements into dance by putting mythological themes into the dance structure and using stylized mask is a very fascinating aspect of the study of Chhau dances.

AWASTHI: I would now like to talk about the other element that also greatly affects the nature and style of Chhau dances. I am referring to the elaborate rituals observed before the annual dance festival. This ritualistic context of the Chhau dances has a deep influence; and the dance cannot be understood isolated from the rituals. The intensity and the trance-like quality of the dances does indicate that in essence Chhau dances are ritualized body movements. In the early sixties when, for the first time, systematic studies of Chhau dances were taken up by dance scholars, they often referred to the rituals as an activity disconnected from the dance. Now there is a better understanding of the role of the rituals in shaping the dance. Some of the scholars in Orissa have even emphasized close links between the Shiva and Shakti Cults prevalent in this region and the Chhau dances of Mayurbhanja. Gambhira dances of West Bengal have a similar association with the Shiva Cult. Some scholars have also indicated the relationship between the rituals of Chhau dances and those observed by certain tribes in this region—worship of Dand (pole), symbolic representation of Shiva. These are new ideas in regard to the study of the nature of rituals and their role in Chhau dances. However, it seems to me that this subject calls for a study in greater depth. The link between the rituals and the dances is certainly there, but we need to determine more precisely the evolution of dances, in association with, and as products of, the rituals. Several other forms of dance and theatre in our country have a strong ritualistic base.

Sahoo (left) and student demonstrate Astradand (sword play).

SAHOO: The occasion for the annual dance festival is the celebration of the spring festival, which we call Chitra Parva. The celebration of spring has an ancient tradition and is widespread. The arts of the dance and music have always been associated with the celebration. The association of Chhau dances with the spring celebration is in itself an important fact. For thirteen days preceding the festival, rituals are performed by a group of twelve dancer-priests called Bhaktas (devotees). These are selected from different castes, mostly low castes. They fast, take ritual baths and perform daily rituals. They assemble at the Shiva temple, move in procession, chanting and dancing, and visit the dance arena in the palace. One of the devotees leads the procession with the flagstaff known as Danda. The *Natyasastra,* a famous treatise on dramaturgy (second century A.D.), also refers to the Danda as part of the worship of the stage. Along with the rituals the devotees perform many miraculous feats, such as rolling on thorns and walking on fire. The most important part of the ritual is the Jatra-ghat (pilgrimage with a pitcher of holy water). A dancer carrying a pitcher on his head goes to the temple of Shiva dancing to Tandava tunes—these are traditionally masculine and strong. People make offerings and sacrifice goats in front of the dancer, as if he were Shiva-Shakti incarnate. People chant "Mahadeva, Mahadeva!" (glory to Shiva). The celebrations are dedicated to the Ardhanarishwar, a composite form of Shiva and Shakti. Ardhanarishwar is an important dance number in the Chhau dance repertory, and in many ways the most representative number of the spirit and technique of Chhau dances.

I have not described the rituals in detail. There is no doubt that the observance of these fills the whole atmosphere with religious frenzy; the dance festival is very much an extension and culmination of these rituals. Dancing as part of the annual celebrations with the rituals as the background is a very different experience from dancing on other occasions in city theatres to urban audiences. The religious and the artistic experience are not separated; they are one. In Indian esthetics the artistic experience has been treated as akin to religious experience, both being considered twin brothers, Brahma and Sahodara.

AWASTHI: Now I would like you to talk about the use of masks in Chhau. In Seraikella Chhau, flat neutral masks suddenly become alive with varying shades of expression during the course of the performance.

SAHOO: I will tell you my experience as a performer. I have seen masks being used ever since I started dancing. There is not much written history of Chhau dances; but we are told that the mask has evolved along with the dances. In the beginning, very crude masks made of bamboo strips and painted in different colors were used. At some stage wooden masks were also used. But the masks made of clay and papier-maché have been used now for more than half a century. There are many craftsmen who make masks. P.K. Mahapatra is the oldest mask-maker, and for many years was associated with the palace.

AWASTHI: Yes, I have known him and his work for the last fifteen years. When you meet him, and talk to him about his masks, he puts on a mask and starts demonstrating movements. He is now over eighty. Last year when I met him, he put on the mask of the lion and started showing the movements of the lion. But tell me, how is a mask designed?

SAHOO: It is a creative process. After choosing the theme for a new dance we contemplate various characters and study relevant literature. If the characters are birds, animals, or natural phenomenon, we observe their behavior. Having gone through this

process, the dancer-choreographer will go to the mask-maker and explain his conception. He will then think of a design. It is a two-fold process. I remember vividly the experience of conceiving the mask of Ratri (night) when I had choreographed this dance. I studied Ratri Sukta (hymns on the night) in Rigveda, and observed the night, and tried to feel its life and rhythm. The mask that finally emerged has a mysterious, dreamlike quality and an affectionate, motherly expression. The mask of the peacock tries to capture the grace and the rhythm of the bird. We try to catch and express essence, and avoid realistic representation. In the Mayur (peacock) dance the movements are not imitative. We conceive the movements in a zone which is between the real and the unreal. The mask greatly helps and strengthens this approach to the movements.

There is great difference of opinion about the meaning of the word Chhau. According to some it is akin to the Sanskrit word chhaya (shadow) or chhadma (disguise), while others consider it to mean to attack stealthily. According to some, it is derived from the word chhawani, meaning military cantonment. I cannot speak with authority about the origin and meaning of the word chhau, but for me the idea of chhaya (shadow) is very important. As a performer, I see my characters and incidents as in Chhaya, which is both real and unreal. It is a very special perception of reality, and in this perception mask plays a vital role.

AWASTHI: What is your relationship to the mask? How do you feel when you put on the mask and when you remove it? Don't you want to see and to be seen by your audiences?

SAHOO: Using a mask is a denial of the view, but not the experience, of my audience. There is constant interaction between the performer and the audience at some deep level. The audience accepts me as a performer with the mask. Inside the mask I laugh and cry, and communicate my joys and sorrows to the audience through my body. The mask is integral, inseparable to my creative act as a dancer. It is not an appendage or a prop. The mask is as much my medium as my body. My conception and my wearing of the mask motivates my movements. I feel very close to the mask. The very touch of the mask makes me contemplative, and inspires movements. It affords an easy transformation, and helps in sustaining and deepening the transformation. I cannot think of dancing without a mask. It will not be inspired; I will not feel involved. It will be a mere demonstration of movements, and not a performance. The mask is essential to my performance, as much as the drum. After the dance when I take off the mask, I have a sense of fulfillment. We have a sense of reverence for the mask. There is a quality of otherworldliness about it. Despite many similarities in theme, music, and movements between our dances and those of Mayurbhanja, because of the use of masks, our dances are very different in essence.

AWASTHI: Tell me something about the making of the masks.

SAHOO: Masks are made of dark clay found at the banks of the local river, Kharakei. First the clay model of a character is made, and fixed on a wooden plank for long enough time to harden. Then a muslin gauze is pasted on it with two or more layers of paper. Over these layers is again pasted muslin to which is given another thick coating of the clay. When it dries up, the artist scrubs the mask with a sharp instrument, and then polishes it. Afterwards coloring is done. Colors are chosen on the basis of the nature of the character, and follow the tradition. Krishna's mask is dark blue, Durga is gold, Shiva is white, Ganesh is red, Hansa is white, and the deer is yellow. We use a lot of pink. Everytime a mask is made a new mold is prepared. A mold is not used for a mechanical reproduction of masks. Also if you carefully observe Seraikella masks you

Swan mask

will find that the overall design of most of the human masks is similar; it is a subtle point in the delineation of eyes, lips or nose that creates the difference, and establishes a character. And of course different color is used for different characters. It is the essence, the spirit of a character which is captured in the mask. The mask is like a mirror that reflects a dominant emotion. The headdress is also conceived to suit the character. The headdress of peacock is very different from that of Sun and that of Krishna from that of Durga.

AWASTHI: What about the grammar, the movement technique and sources of imagery of Chhau dances?

SAHOO: To understand the structure of the Chhau dance, we break it down into smaller choreographic units. It is the combination of these units in a pattern in response to the nature of the narrative that creates the dance structure. Like other classical dance styles, Bharatnatyam, Kathak, Kathakali, Odissi etc., Chhau also has a fixed basic posture that serves as a baseline for building up the dance structure. This basic posture in Chhau called Dharan (literally holding) is the position of holding sword and shield. The arm movements continuously suggest the holding of weapons with the right arm on a level higher than the shoulder, and the left arm at the level of the waist. All units of dance emerge from this basic stance. The three units of Chhau are Topaka-s, Ufli-s and Bhangi-s. Topaka is the mode of movement where the torso is mainly responsible for translating the imagery into movements; the leg movement follows the torso. In Chhau there is no footwork, so typical of classical dance styles. Leg extension is a very special feature of Chhau.

AWASTHI: Yes, it is very much like the western classical ballet. In Mayurbhanja Chhau it is also very balletic. The basic posture, called Chauk, has an open tribhang (three-bent) and a rectangular position (akin to an open grand-plié of the Western ballet). When I first saw Mayurbhanja Chhau dances in 1966, I was struck by their ballet-like quality, and felt that it was a pity that the contemporary choreographers and ballet-directors were not using these dances for evolving a modern dance idiom suitable for the ballet, and that they were working for the last four decades without a dramatic dance language. Sometimes ! have a feeling that the dancers and gurus must have been exposed to the Western dance. There are references to their being sent by the Mayubhanja royal house to Calcutta to watch other styles of dances. At one stage a Kathakali dancer was engaged to teach mudras (hand-gestures). Also, under the guidance of a Russian conductor, Western musical instruments were included in the orchestra.

SAHOO: As dancers we have certainly seen other styles of dances, but there is no such thing as borrowing from other styles. The ballet-like quality is inherent in Chhau dances. The technique of Chaau dances should have been utilized for contemporary ballet. None of our classical dance styles are suited for full-fledged ballets, but Chhau is.

AWASTHI: You were talking about various units of dance. You explained the basic posture and use of leg movements.

SAHOO: I explained Topka. To use "sastric" terminology, Topka falls under the classification of nritta, pure dance. Some of the topka are, Juar (wave), Hansa-Chali (gait of a swan), Ghoda Jama (running gait of a horse), Sagar gati (movement of ocean), Mayur gati (gait of peacock), Bagh Chali (gait of a lion). Ufli is the dance unit when movement of legs translate the imagery and the torso follows it. There are many uflis and sub-uflis. Most of the uflis are based on the imagery drawn from the daily chores of a Oriya housewife, such as, gobarghola—mixing and slapping cow dung; Kula pacchda—husking and pounding rice; pithabata—grinding grain rice; Khadumanja—cleaning the anklets, Sindur tika—putting sacred vermillion mark on the forehead; Jala bahiba—carrying water. In a dance topkas and uflis succeed one another, enlarging the range of movement. Bhangi is a unit of dance that is composed by amalgamation of more than one topka and ufli according to the demand of the theme and its appropriateness to the rhythm. In composing bhangis the dancer uses his imagination, his creative faculty. Bhangis fall under the classification of nritya and natya, expressional and interpretive dance. Most of the bhangis represent various emotions and moods, such as smeha—affection; lajja—bashfulness; bishad—sorrow; krandan—crying; abhishap—curse; and also those expressing natural phenomena, such as, vidyut—lightning, ardha-chandra—half moon; pralaya—deluge, srishti—universe.

AWASTHI: I find it fascinating the way routine activity, life of the common people, natural phenomena and animal behavior are transformed into dance movements. The dance is rooted in people's culture. You have mentioned the strong use of legs in Chhau dances. This certainly is the most striking feature. With such use of legs the approach to and treatment of space in Chhau dance is very different from other forms of Indian dance, and vitally contributes to its structure and style. Bhramaris (spiral movements) and utplavanas (jumps) are designed to treat space differently. The dancers cover the whole space available. No matter where the dancer's body is, the entire space becomes alive. Space is made an integral part of the choreographic design. This results in the formation of expressive space designs. These space and time-designs are superbly

balanced, and greatly contribute to the overall structure of the dance. The dancers have an sense of space, and it is this feeling that is most dominant in all the three styles of Chhau dances.

SAHOO: We do not maintain a baseline as the dancer does in classical dance. In our treatment of space we come very close to the Western ballet. We weave space into our movements. Another special feature of Chhau dance is our dynamics, the whole process of conservation and release of energy. Angular and sideways movements, and sudden turns and twists, alternate with gliding lyrical movements. This heightens the effect of the mask.

AWASTHI: Another aspect which I find distinctive of Chhau dances, is that each dance is structured in a series of phrases. The dance opens with the dancer standing still, like a statue, with tremendous concentrated power. Having established his entry, the dancer begins to develop the theme with a sense of dramatic progression; and the dance concludes with a fast tempo. Now I would like to know the relationship between the choreography and the music.

SAHOO: There is no vocal music in any of the three styles of Chhau dances. It is rare that any textual material is used in Purulia and Mayurbhanja dances. But even when used it is very thin. Dances are danced to the traditional melodies used on Oriya folk songs and medieval poetic compositions. In Chhau music the *tala* (time-beat) is unique. It has been evolved to suit open-air performances. A kettle drum, called Nagara, is played by beating with two sticks. It gives a resonant, vibrant thud-like sound. Another drum, Dhol, is played by beating with both the hands. There are two wind instruments, Shahenai (reed-pipe) and flute. While the main source for the melodies is traditional music, the ragas of classical music are also used. There is an organic relationship between the choreography and the music. I'll tell you how a dance is composed and you will see the relationship. After selecting a theme we compose the tala that expresses the idea of the theme. Sometimes traditional talas are changed to make a framework for the movements. This tala is then filled with a melody. The melody is taken from folk songs and medieval Oriya poetry. After reaching the climax of the dance there is a short concluding sequence, a kind of denouement, in a tala different from that of the main dance. This concluding sequence is called Nachapali. Here some movements of the main dance are repeated—to reawaken the esthetic experience.

AWASTHI: In your musical scheme, you have adopted the three stages of *laya* (rhythm) of Hindustani classical music. These three stages—*bilambit*, (slow), *madhyam* (medium), and *drut* (fast)—clearly define the three stages of dance. While generally slow and medium are played for a longer duration, and also for an equal duration, fast is played for a much shorter duration, leading the dance to a quick, grand finale. Rhythmic structure guides the slow building up of energy in the dancer, releasing it with great gusto in the final *drut* stage. Tell me something about the Chhau repertory.

SAHOO: There is a great range and variety of themes in Chhau. It has grown during my dancing career of 50 years. The earliest numbers were simpler, and closer to the parikhanda exercises—numbers like *Sabar* (hunter) *Dhiber* (fisherman) *Nabik* (boatman) and *Astrodwanda* (sword play). The second category of dances are those that deal with the themes from the two epics and the mythology. Some of these dances are *Ardhanarishwar* (the composite form of Shiva and Shakti), *Radha-Krishna*, *Hara-Parvati* (Shiva and his Consort), *Durga* (killing of the demon Mahisha by the goddess Durga),

Mayur (peacock)

Kacha-Devayani (a legend from the *Mahabharata*); *Ramashok* (Sorrow of Rama, from the *Ramayana*). The third category of dances are those that deal with the aspects of nature. *Ratri* (night), *Sagar* (ocean); *Hansa* (swan), *Mayur* (peacock) are some of the important dances of this category. In the thirties and the forties several numbers were composed on nationalist themes inspired by the freedom movement. These are: *Pataka* (flag), *Bandir-Swapna* (the dream of a prisoner) *Bharatmata* (Mother India). Most of the dances are solos and duets; their duration is six to ten minutes. Group dances are very few, and were composed much later. The longest dance is *Meghadoot* (cloud-messenger). This 30-minute dance-drama based on the Sanskrit lyric poem of the same name by Kalidasa was composed by Prince Sudhendra Singh.

AWASTHI: so newly composed dance numbers, in course of time, become part of the tradition. Dances are passed on from one generation to the other without being notated or available on films. This situation has one advantage: dances are not frozen; each generation, while retaining the main structure, adds something new. I would now like to ask you about Chhau's present condition, the training program, and the future. There are very few occasions when performances of Chhau dances are organized as an artistic event. It was in 1967 that Chhau dances were brought to New Delhi; there has been no second occasion in New Delhi. In 1977 I helped organize a Chhau dance festival and a seminar in Calcutta. It was the first time all three kinds of Chhau were performed together.

The deer

Purulia Chhau has a popular base in the villages. During the last five years Purulia received some encouragement through tours abroad. In case of Mayurbhanja style, there is only one institution in Baripada, the main center of the dance, that has been sustaining the tradition by organizing annual festivals and giving part-time training. Mayurbhanja receives financial assistance both from the State and the Central Academy. The support, however, is very inadequate. The Mayurbhanja style also was helped when two gurus got Central Academy awards. Krishna Chand Nayak has been getting a fellowship of Rs.500/- per month for the last five years and is currently attached to a modern ballet group in Delhi. Last year he composed a new dance-drama—*konark*—with the dancers of this group. It was the first time that a full-fledged dance-drama was composed in this style. Mayurbhanja Chhau is being taught in the State Academy-run Music College in Bhubneswar to boys and girls who are primarily learning the classical dance, Odissi. This started some six years ago. These are new dimensions of the growth of a traditional art form.

In case of Seraikella Chhau dances, I am afraid, the situation is not very happy. After the merger of the princely state with Bihar, royal patronage was finished. The State Government is running the training school of which you have been the Director for fifteen years. But there is no financial support from the Central Academy. This year for the first time two of your boys have received central scholarship for higher training in dance, and you got a fellowship of Rs.500/- per month for training these two boys. This support is inadequate. There are not many good dancers or gurus. You are the only great guru in the tradition. I am very apprehensive about the future.

SAHOO: I share your worry about the future of these beautiful dances. You know very well that the Chhau Dance School at Seraikella is run with very few resources. We do not have even proper space for training. There are few scholarships to attract talented boys. Some young boys join the School, receive training for a few years, and never become performers. You are right: there are not many first-rate dancers. Even those who pursue the training do not have much opportunity to perform. Somehow the scope has to be widened. I wish Chhau dances were introduced as one of the subjects in schools. In that case boys trained here could be engaged as dance teachers. The State Government should also support a professional group. There should be more opportunities both within and outside the region to give performances. Chhau is a regional art form, but to survive it cannot remain confined to the region. I feel sad and broken when I see Chhau in this pitiable situation. The apathy of the State Government is most painful. There is a reason for that. Culturally Seraikella belongs to Orissa—but after independence, as part of the reorganization of the States, it was merged with the Bihar.

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Spirit Cult Festivals in South Kanara

by Martha Bush Ashton

On the southwest coast of India, between the mountain range of the Western Ghats and the Arabian Sea, lies the South Kanara District of Karnataka State. Here, paddy fields and plantations of palm, mango, cashew and banana alternate with patches of thick jungle forest. In this lush setting, devotees of nearly three hundred cults meet in nightlong sessions offering worship to locally unique spirit deities. Some of these spirits are believed to have been sent to earth by Hindu Gods; others are considered the souls of persons who long ago died violent and untimely deaths. Yet others are recent

ancestors troubling their descendants. As spirits have benevolent and malevolent aspects and are believed to possess power over human health, fertility and fortune and over the land and cattle, they must be ritually propitiated.

Each spirit has its own form, mythic history, special powers and propitiatory requirements. Therefore the worship of each spirit differs somewhat from that of all others. Every spirit has devotees (most of whom are also devotees of other spirits as well) who worship and make offerings to it daily at domestic shrines. Public worship occurs monthly in ceremonies in which the spirit's priest is possessed by the spirit. Each year or so a large festival is celebrated.

These festivals are usually held close to the spirits' permanent shrines. A spirit shrine may be an actual construction in which images and other materials for worship are kept. Less commonly nowadays, a shrine may be merely a site in a field or grove that the spirit is known to frequent, sometimes marked by a stone or pile of stones, sometimes unmarked, but known to all devotees. If the site has no permanent altar, one is constructed for the festival.

A festival begins with a procession. Images, masks, swords, shields, bells and other materials are carried from their place of storage to the altar. Musicians accompany the procession, and worshipers, alerted by the music, follow it to the shrine. As it is dark, the area is lighted by fire torches and gasoline lanterns, though a rich shrine may have electricity. The ceremony proper begins when a dancer comes before the altar to request oil for his bath and to prepare his makeup. Near the shrine in an area set aside, his family is preparing parts of the costume in full view of the audience (Photo 1). When the dancer returns from his bath he applies makeup (Photo 2) as two family members chant the spirit's story. Makeup is mostly yellow, but red, white and black are also used. Most spirits have patterns of makeup unique to them.

Meanwhile the priest comes before the altar. Wearing a simple costume (either short red pants adorned with bells or a silk cloth wrapped around his torso and anklets and sometimes a white turban), he is given the spirit's sword, bell and yak-tail fan to hold. After he is sprinkled with water, the audience throws rice or flowers on him to signify its request that the spirit enter his body. He begins to shake from his feet up until his entire body is trembling. Often he shouts wildly, puffs out his cheeks, stares at the sky, and runs to and from the altar. When the priest begins to tremble, one or two musicians play rapid extemporaneous a-melodic doodles on oboe-like instruments called *mauris*. Two to five drummers, each with a different timbred drum, begin to play rapid extemporaneous rhythmic passages. When the priest is close to full trance, this changes to a high-pitched rhythmic repetition of one note, with the drums as loud and rapid as possible. Finally the spirit comes. When the priest is fully possessed, the spirit, through him, relates the *nudi kattu*. This speech, which summarizes the spirit's origin story and the story of how it came to be worshipped in this place, is delivered in a highly stylized and dramatic manner. It includes a short account of how the patron's ancestors conducted the festivals in the past and how the spirit, in turn, treated them.

Now the *madipu* (the patron or a spokesman representing the worshipers) informs the spirit with an extemporaneous speech why it has been summoned, what preparations have been made and what offerings will be given. This speech is delivered in a stylized manner different from that of the *nudi kattu*. *Madipu* means "consultation, deliberation, settlement, resolution" or "one who brings these things about." It is said that the attitude of the spirit can be changed by the *madipu*; one who is clever with words can transform an irate spirit into an approachable one.

Next there may be a short session in which a few of the devotees ask the spirit for advice. The questioning devotees speak in ordinary conversational Tulu; the spirit, speaking through the priest, answers in Tulu in the style of *nudi kattu*; and the *madipu*,

Dancer's family members prepare a headdress of pale for the spirit named Rakteshwari.

Dancer making up for Rakteshwari spirit.

Rakteshwari spirit begins to dance.

Dancer possessed by Rakteshwari bhuta *(spirit).*

Rakteshwari bhuta *being fitted with headdress of banana stalk and palm leaves. The headdress already secured is made of* pale.

in turn, interprets in ordinary Tulu. The *medipu* also translates questions and the spirit's answers to them for the occasional non-Tulu speaking devotee.

After this, the spirit is requested to leave the priest's body and enter the body of the dancer. The dancer, his face made up, wearing cloth pajamas, a shirt and basic ornaments, stands before the altar. He turns to face the audience and asks permission of the spirit and of the audience to put on the anklets that invite the spirit to enter his body. The anklets are made of metal and are hollow with small metal balls inside. The one worn on the right leg is high-pitched and is considered male; the one on the left, low-pitched and considered female. Water is sprinkled onto the priest to release the spirit and onto the dancer to receive it. The audience again throws rice or flowers, this time onto the dancer.

Holding the magic anklets, one in either hand, and thrusting his arms vigorously and rhythmically away from his body (Photo 6), the dancer begins to work himself into a trance, shouting, puffing, staring and running, as the priest had done earlier. To the same kind of music that earlier was played for the priest, he runs from in front of the altar back and forth in each of the eight directions, towards sacred spots near the shrine, or merely at random. Finally he puts on the anklets on. Their haunting sound continues throughout the festival, a constant reminder of the spirit's presence. As long as the spirit is in a human body, that body moves.

Now the dancer asks permission of the spirit and the audience to put on the palm-leaf skirt. He holds it in his hands, dances with it and finally puts it on (Photo 8). (Spirits who wear a cloth skirt also wear anklets, but the ritual for putting them on does not take place.) To the sound of the music, the dancer works himself into a frenzy, holding fire torches to his bared chest, walking on hot coals or placing hot coals inside his mouth, evidence that the spirit is in his body. Sometimes he dances with great speed until collapsing in fatigue (Photo 7). After a brief rest the dancer, still representing the spirit, dances to traditional, folk and popular tunes (which may include Tulu film songs, "Onward Christian Soldiers," "Red River Valley," "For He's A Jolly Good Fellow").

Anklet ceremony for the spirit of the wild-boar, Panjurli.

Above, dancer in a state of being possessed by the spirit called Panjurli.

Below, the spirit of Panjurli prepares to hold a torch to his chest.

Below, Panjurli bhuta in full costume, including boar-mask made of pale.

certain day, but he hadn't returned yet. This was absolutely the last time she would come to the festival and the last time she would give money. She said that if it couldn't deliver, it could not be a very powerful spirit.

Sometimes people argued or bargained with the spirit. Often disputants brought their problems to the spirit to resolve, as when a lender and a borrower came to settle terms for repayment of the loan. The angry lender said that he had given the borrower much longer to pay back the loan than he had originally requested, and it had not yet been repaid. He doubted the borrower's intention to repay. With tears streaming down his cheeks, the borrower pleaded that he was still having hard times and that he was trying to get money to repay. The lender offered the spirit a deal: "If you get the money back for me I will give a portion of it to you. I will have a wall built around your shrine." The borrower couldn't offer the spirit much since he had no money. (I never found out the outcome).

One woman claimed she had been possessed for seven years by the spirit of her dead child, a son who had been struck by a bolt of lightning. She believed that his life had not been fulfilled as he had not married and sired children. Knowing her situation, the spirit told her to prepare two dolls, one male and one female, and to marry them in a traditional wedding ceremony. This, he said, would satisfy her son.

When the last of the questioners has been, if not satisfied, at least answered, the dancer is sprinkled once again with water, releasing him from the possession trance. The dancer retires to remove costume and makeup and the crowd disperses. The festival is over.

A typical spirit worship festival may begin with the procession in the late afternoon. The possession of the priest occurs at about 8 p.m., the possession of the dancer at about 10 p.m., the palanquin or image procession after midnight and the consultation beginning about 3 a.m. and lasting until dawn. Sometimes two or more spirits are worshipped at a single festival, each with its own priest and dancer, though a single *madipu* interprets for all.

A festival such as the one described is costly: the dancer, the band, the priest, the costumers all have to be paid; there is oil for the lamps, the pre-festival renovation of the shrine, much of the offerings. Almost all of the patrons are landlords, and with land reform, there are fewer and fewer of them. Worship of the spirits will almost certainly continue, but the days of the festivals and the theatrical creativity these festivals provide the occasion for are numbered.

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The Teyyam Kettu of Northern Kerala

by Wayne Ashley

Slaughtered goats are scattered everywhere, lying in pools of blood outside the temple compound. Decapitated chickens have been thrown together in large separate piles. The god Karin Camundi's mask lies discarded atop one of the mounds of carcasses, soaked with blood and feathers. The paint is soiled and the image of the god has begun to blur. There are no drums, no firecrackers. It is predawn, and the only light is a faint blue glow. Some of the sacrificial goats hanging from trees are being skinned and prepared for selling. The temple grounds are empty after the previous night's festivities, when hundreds of anxious spectators crowded together, pressing to catch a glimpse of their god gulping down blood of the sacrificial animals. The flies come with the day. This is the aftermath of one of the bloodiest performances of *teyyam kettu*—a highly structured ritual folk performance in the Cannanore District, Kerala State, Southwestern India.

Teyyam kettu means "to prepare the god." *Teyyam* is a colloquial expression which means god and generally refers to numerous spirits, ancient heroes, ancestors and various Puranic deities; *kettu* is the word for prepare or dress. In other parts of the district it is known by other names—*teyyattam, terayattam.* During the months of November through June, for periods lasting up to seven days and nights, the teyyams are worshipped in both private and community shrines. The number of teyyams is vast and each fulfills a unique function. Some teyyams are responsible for fulfilling the aspirations of their devotees, others for the multiplication or destruction of cattle, for agricultural prosperity or attainment of wealth, and still others for matters involving birth, death and marriage. Some are worshipped exclusively by specific castes, others may belong to *taravatu* (joint family) or individual households, and some give benefits to the entire society. The number of teyyams honored at a single festival varies from one to dozens. The shrine at Pathikkal houses twelve teyyams, and in Cannanore as many as thirty-nine gods have been propitiated at a single performance. The various gods have been accumulated over hundreds of years.

Performances in community shrines have fixed dates and repeat themselves annually, or occasionally every two, three and five years, depending upon the costs of the performance and the economic status of the village. The propitiation of some teyyams requires that the entire community be fed, which often means accommodating thousands of people. The Grand Festival at Karippodi in 1978 cost the community Rs 195,000 ($24,000) and took 55 years to collect. Smaller household performances also repeat themselves annually but have no fixed dates. Instead, they are arranged by astrological calculations. Private, individual performances are of another nature altogether: these are unscheduled performances which are commissioned as a direct reciprocal offering to a deity who has gratified the wishes of a devotee. A single performance of this kind is called *nercca kolam* or "a vow to god." In Karivellur, a *nercca kolam* dedicated to Muttappan, an incarnation of Siva, was commissioned by a woman to repay the deity for the safe delivery of her daughter's child. A houseowner cured of leprosy built a shrine to the teyyam Visnumurthi and commissioned *teyyam kettu* every year as repayment. A villager explained that *nercca kolam* will most often be performed whether the teyyam has fulfilled the wishes of the devotee or not. The deity could bring chaos or further complications to him and his family if a vowed performance is not carried out.

Although the actual performance of *teyyam kettu* involves many individuals and demands participation and interaction among several castes, it is primarily a solo performance. The primary performer is accompanied by drummers and several assistants who escort him through the entire performance. The performer is called a *kolakkaran* or *teyyakkaran*, "the man who takes the form of god." He is a male member of one of several specific low castes, who performs *teyyam kettu* as a means of earning his livelihood. He is paid very little and often must supplement his income with such jobs as weaving baskets, repairing umbrellas, and rolling cigarettes. This is not to say that performers in Kerala are especially of low status. In the past Kathakali dance drama was performed almost exclusively by Nairs, a military and landowning community of high status; *Kutiyattam,* a temple Sanskrit drama, has always been performed by members of the Brahmin community. Although he belongs to the lowest subdivision in the social structure, during the performance of *teyyam kettu*, this low caste man will become an incarnation of god, a teyyam, and will be revered and treated appropriately by other members of the community.

Teyyam kettu is not an isolated phenomenon but a complex which has continued to incorporate different deities, rituals, and symbols over the past several centuries. Performances are part of the local folk traditions, within the larger Kerala State traditions,

and within the still greater "all India," Hindu traditions. There is continual interchange among the three. Thus one is able to find spirits and family ancestors worshipped alongside "Hinduized" teyyams like Visnumurthi and the Ramayana deities, Rama and Sita; meat-eating gods next to vegetarian gods; sanskrit rituals and prayers next to local folk rituals and beliefs. The performance also reflects the social structures prescribed in the Vedas which divides society into Brahmins at the top followed by kings-warriors, landowners and the remaining castes. This ritual hierarchy will emerge repeatedly in many aspects of the performance.

The Brahmin community plays a significant role in the event. Although they rarely take part in, or are present at the festivals of the other communities, their position is evident. According to one informant in Kotakkat, no teyyam shrine is considered sacred/operative until a *tantri* Brahmin consecrates it, thus bringing it into existence. And it is the idol inside the shrine which designates an operative or inoperative shrine. The *tantri* is the sole possessor of highly charged mantras and rituals which transfer *sakti* (force-power) to the idol of the shrine, endowing it with its power. Without such a ceremony, the idol is impotent, and in the eyes of the community the shrine does not exist. The *tantri* instructs the community in how the rituals must be performed to propitiate the teyyam and if there is any pollution in the shrine, he is called upon to conduct purification rites. Another ritual prevalent in the Kotakkat area brings out another aspect of Brahmin involvement. In this ritual "Visnumurthi teyyam goes to the temple of the Brahmin to give the priest a small sum of money," explains a performer, "as a symbol that we [low caste] are slaves of the King." At the Grand Festival at Karippodi, the performance will not commence until the sacred torch from the nearby Brahmin temple has been brought to the performance site to consecrate the event.

Next to the Brahmin in ritual power is the Raja (King) of Cannanore District. Although virtually powerless today, he still has a role in the performance. In the past, according to M.G.S. Narayanan, University of Calicut, the Raja designated which castes were to perform each teyyam and special mention of the Raja was included in the invocations made by the performer to the teyyam. The Raja allocated special honorary titles and gold bracelets to performers of high physical and intellectual accomplishment.

Far in advance of the actual performance, the beneficiary approaches the performers to fix a date for the event. A betel leaf containing arecanut and a small sum of money is given to the performer as a kind of contract. On the day of the performance, performers arrive at the shrine early in the evening and begin setting up their temporary living spaces. Costumes and paraphernalia are hung and arranged inside the hut or on branches of trees. During this time, the official members of the shrine meet secretly to decide upon which performers will incarnate each teyyam. Their decision is based upon the physical appearance of the performer and upon his performances of the previous years. He will not be chosen again if previously he had deviated from the prescribed rituals or traditional way of performing the teyyam; or if he forgot important information, such as calling out the names of all the *taravatu* (joint family) of the beneficiaries who are commissioning the performance; or if he hadn't succeeded in communicating an inspiring transmission of the god's words.

All of the performers assemble in front of the shrine and the *karnavan* (eldest member and chief administrator of the *taravatu*) announces the decision of the committee, alloting each teyyam to individual performers. After this point, the chosen performers must observe a fast until after their performance is completed. This fast often lasts for two days. For the propitiation of some deities, the performer is chosen many days before the commencement of the performance and must undergo a preparatory period called *nonpu* which puts him in partial and in some cases, total isolation of anywhere from one to eight days. In Kotakkat, the *kolakkaran* remains in his house and

sometimes in special rooms adjacent to the shrine constructed especially for that purpose. He abstains from sex, eating meat, or drinking alcoholic beverages. All food must be prepared and served by post-menopausal or pre-pubescent women. In specific cases, women are completely restricted from the premises, and the *kolakkaran* must not speak to anyone. The performer enters into a process that has as its goal the total focus of physical and mental energy toward the teyyam he will later incarnate. Performers in Kotakkat refer to this as *ekacinta*, or one thought, accomplished by the continuous recitation of mantras and prayers. One performer describes his experiences during this period:

> *During sporadic intervals, I am inhabited with the sakti of the teyyam which causes me to quiver and emit sudden outbursts of sound. It compels me to leave my room and journey to the nearby shrine where I display the anger and power of the teyyam by stamping and shouting. After a short time, I return to my room. The quivering resides and I resume reciting the mantras.*
>
> *Neighbors tell me that one night they heard a lot of commotion outside. When they looked out of their windows they saw me pacing back and forth in front of the shrine yelling loudly. I was completely unaware. Not until the next day did they inform me of what had happened.*

It is extremely rare to find performers who experience this preparatory stage with this kind of intensity.

The community festival takes place in a space which can be mapped out something like this. (See facing page.)

The shrine is at the center, and the performance space extends out into other parts of the village. The immediate area that encompasses the shrine will become the explosive area of the performance, where most of the activity will take place. In the next area, preparations for the transformation are undertaken: face painting, costume construction, invocations, etc. Here, performers and their families sleep, eat and carry on their daily life. The adjacent area, which is less defined, makes up the festival market, an integral part of nearly every community festival. This region is scattered with tea shops, fruit stalls, temporary stores selling cloth, sandals, mirrors, and cakes. Occasionally, portable, hand-operated ferris wheels are set up, and gambling in numerous forms is abundant. Young boys and girls come to watch each other and it is said that occasionally men make contact with prostitutes. Performance is not confined to the central shrine and during the event it is not uncommon for the performance to move to other parts of the village. Activities frequently originate outside, at the temple of the high caste, for example, and conclude at the shrine.

The area which encompasses the shrine is the focal point of the performance and needs to be examined in more detail. Notice that the organization of space strongly emphasizes the ritual hierarchy among members of the community.

The shrine is occupied by the priests and leaders of the sponsoring community. The area called sacred space 1 is often enclosed within four short walls: sandals must be removed before entering here. The dotted line surrounding the shrine represents sacred space 2, the distance the Kopalan Caste (performers of ritually low status) must keep from the actual shrine and members within. The social structure in Kerala until recently had required the members of different castes to keep certain distances from each other in order to prevent "pollution." The lower the status, the farther the distance kept from members higher than oneself. (See facing page.)

SCHOOL
TEMPLE OF HIGH CASTE
MAIN ROAD
VILLAGE OFFICE
SCHOOL
SCHOOL
MOSQUE
TEMPLE OF HIGH CASTE
FESTIVAL MARKET
SHRINE
PREPARATIONS
FESTIVAL MARKET
VILLAGE BOUNDARIES
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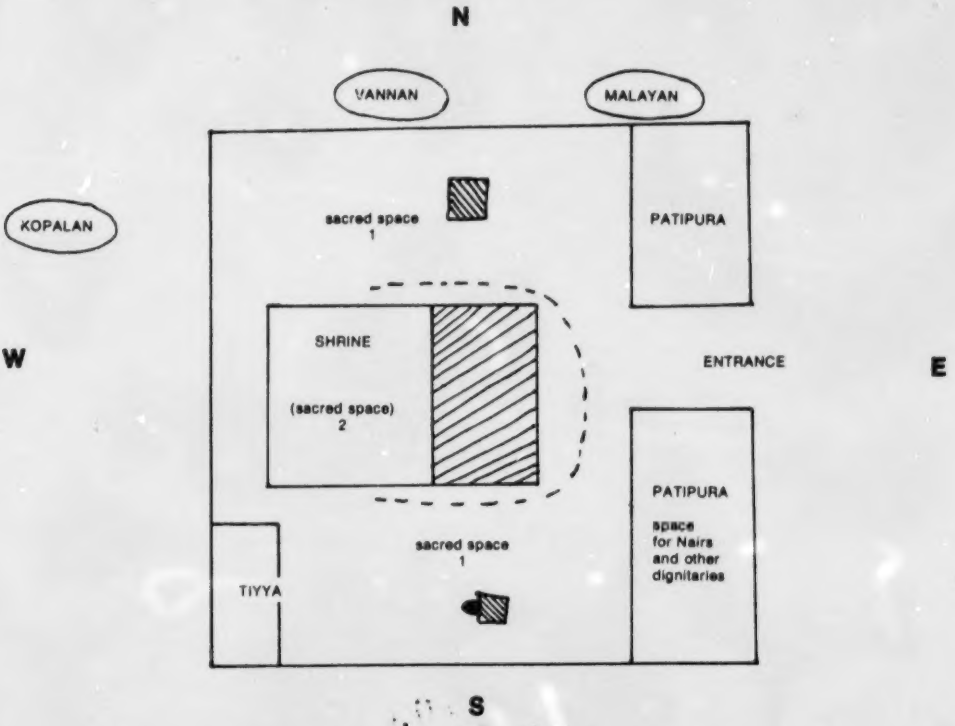

N
VANNAN
MALAYAN
KOPALAN
sacred space 1
PATIPURA
W
SHRINE
(sacred space) 2
ENTRANCE
E
PATIPURA
space for Nairs and other dignitaries
sacred space 1
TIYYA
S

In a separate space, usually within sacred space 1, members of the Tiyya Caste (ritually higher than the performing castes), construct offerings. The *patipura*, a raised platform covered by a tiled roof, is a very exclusive area reserved for the wealthy Nair landowner and other dignitaries. Sometimes the shrine of the teyyam is built on land donated by the family of the *mel koyma*—the highest and most respected Nair landlord—and he will usually finance part of the performance. His importance is so recognized that during the festival at Pathikkal, for example, the teyyam must leave the shrine to make a special visit to his house. There, the *mel koyma* and his family receive honorary blessings.

The community that sponsored the Grand Festival at Karippodi built a large platform over the *patipura*, high above the performing space that was reserved strictly for members of the Brahmin community. The platform was continuously policed to prevent other caste members from occupying that area. Just outside of sacred space 1, in specially built huts, are the spaces reserved for the performing castes of the Vannan and Malayan. And finally, much farther away, with no arrangements, is the space reserved for the lower Kopalan Caste.

Although there are many variations in the performance depending upon location and sponsoring caste, each performance follows a general sequence of events.

In the beginning, the *kolakkaran* approaches the shrine in his everyday dress to receive from the officiating priest a large banana leaf called *kotiyila*. This leaf contains five lighted wicks, arecanut, five betel leaves, turmeric powder and a small amount of uncooked rice. Inside the shrine, the priest passes the lighted wicks of the *kotiyila* over the idol of the teyyam to obtain its *sakti* (power). This is one of the most significant rituals and is repeated for each performer three separate times. The *kotiyila* is the vehicle that transfers the power of the deity from the idol inside the shrine to the *kolakkaran* and the ritual is an important stage in his eventual transformation.

"The five lighted wicks represent the five elements—air, fire, space, water, and earth," explains a performer. "These elements are *sakti*, a power, a force, which no human being can fully grasp. It has no form or color. Human beings cannot exist without the favor of this *sakti*; and without a form people cannot worship it. The teyyam is *sakti* in a form that people can see and concentrate upon."

Then the first of two transformations takes place. Standing in front of the shrine, he sings the life history of the deity from his birth to his godhead. These songs are called *tottam*, a word which means birth, origin or creation. The following description is from the performance in Kotakkat, 1977, which propitiated the god Visnumurthi: the performer wears no makeup and is clad in a simple red dress and a small crown. He is decorated with colorful necklaces and garlands of flowers. Musicians accentuate each line of the story with rhythms played on drums called *centa*. As the story draws to an end, the *centa* become louder and more piercing. The *kolakkaran* begins shaking. Spectators receive handfuls of uncooked rice. His singing stops and his lips move silently as he recites the last section of the *tottam*. Inside the shrine the priest ritually transfers the *sakti* from the idol of the teyyam to a handful of smouldering coals that are contained in a small shallow brass pot. He waves the pot in front of the *kolakkaran*. The smoke, now endowed with the *sakti*, permeates the environment. The shaking becomes more violent. At the final moment, the *kolakkaran* closes his eyes and falls slightly backwards, as if inebriated. Spectators shower him with rice and assistants clear the way leading to the shrine. His eyes bulge and rapidly dart back and forth. Emitting a frightful cry, he springs into the air, kicking and stamping in all directions. Rushing forward to the threshold of the shrine, he drops to his knees and begins to act out the killing of the demon Hiranya. Gesturing with his hands, he slits open the demon's chest and lunges inside. Tearing out the entrails, he drapes them around his neck and douses

The tottam of Vishnumurthi. (Left) Visnumurthi drinks the blood of Hiranya. This section is repeated again after the performer returns completely metamorphosized. (Right) The songs and prayers are completed and the transference of sakti has been made.

himself with the blood. A temple official begins to shake violently throughout the enactment. He faints. Other officials run to give him water. Glaring at the spectators, the teyyam rises to his feet and receives the deity's sword, bow, and arrow from the priest. Dancing triumphantly he bounds high into the air. His steps are firm, and percussive, punctuated by short staccato kicks. In this heated state, he blesses the devotees by showering them with rice. It has been three hours. The dance concludes. The *kolakkaran* jumps into the air, is caught by his assistants and rushed off the performing area.

After all of the *tottams* are completed for each teyyam, preparations are made for the next section of the performance, in which the *kolakkaran* will appear as the teyyam completely metamorphosized.

First his face is painted. This process usually takes no less than two hours to complete and requires much concentration on the part of both the painter and the performer. In Kotakkat, performers explained that throughout this procedure, they will recite the mantras associated with the deity to be performed; the more they are repeated, the greater the presence of the god will be felt. As the *kolakkaran* mixes the makeup, he charges it with the god's *sakti* by chanting the mantras and literally "breathing" them into the mixture. He raises his hand to his mouth and repeats the mantras again, "blowing" them onto the tip of his finger that now contains a small swab of the mixture. He dabs the color carefully onto a special area of the face between the eyes and slightly higher than the brow, then rubs it over his entire face. In this simple action the

Four examples of face writing drawn by a local village artist.

performer has moved closer toward transformation by literally "painting" the deity onto his face. Having been charged with *sakti*, the paint ceases to be merely a physical substance, but becomes both a tangible and spiritual manifestation of the deity. He lies down and the remaining work will be completed by an assistant.

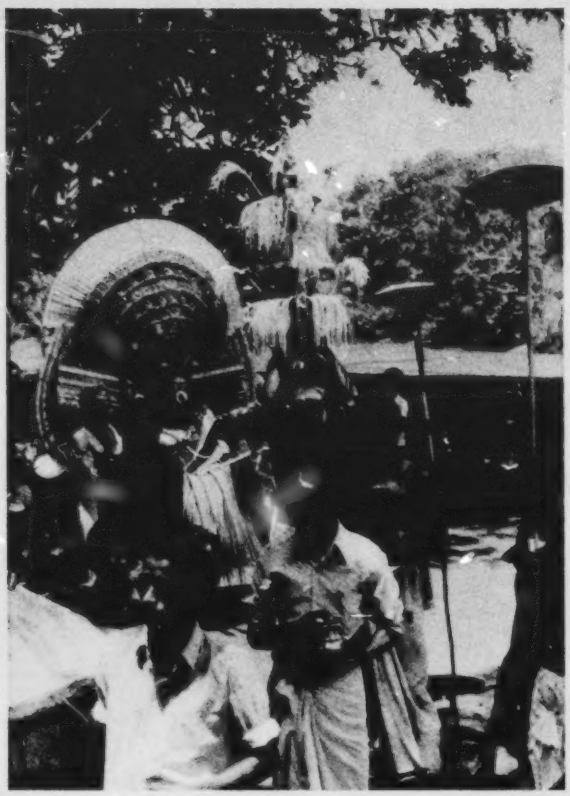
Nearby, other assistants make the costumes. These are intricate constructions that must be newly fabricated for each performance. Costumes spoil shortly after use. Coconut leaves and stems, bamboo, husks from the banana tree, sheaths from the arecanut tree, dried grasses and flowers are assembled into delicate frames and structures that are covered with colored cloth and gilded papers. Intricate wooden shapes covered with gold paper and inlayed with colored glass are fitted together into headdresses, some of which will tower twenty feet into the air. Performers incarnating female teyyams wear breasts carved from wood or coconuts, and sometimes molded out of bronze. Beards woven from jute are often worn by performers incarnating male deities.

The elaborate costume is fixed into place and the performer is escorted to the shrine. He sits down, and facing the entrance he begins a shaking movement in his legs, an intense quivering that travels upward and inhabits the rest of his body. It is a drawing inward of energy that will eventually explode, at the moment of transference to him of

The kolam, or "form of god," as it is called, is literally built onto the performer. Here, a network of supporting frames will be the base for an elaborate structure which will extend the performer's personal space almost 3 or 4 times.

the god's *sakti*. The final touches are made to the costume and the *kolakkaran* is handed his mirror. The shaking becomes more pronounced, the *centas* more forceful, almost deafening. He plucks a small flower from his costume, whispers mantras into it and raises the mirror to his face. After examining his reflection for several moments, the performer's face contorts and becomes awe stricken: "At that moment," one performer explained, "I am no longer seeing my reflection but the face of god peering back at me through the mirror."

Vira Bhatran teyyam performing velattam, an invocatory dance.



Assistants escorting the goddess around the shrine. Community members who have brought offerings join in the procession.

Vishnumurthi teyyam enacting the killing of Hiranya. Gesturing with his hands, he gulps down the blood of the demon.

The following description is from a performance in Uduma, 1978 that propitiated the goddess Muvalan *Kuri* Camundi: upon looking in the mirror his eyes bulge and rapidly move from side to side. His cheeks quiver. His entire body trembles. Opening his mouth, his tongue protrudes till it reaches the tip of his chin. The whole inside of his mouth is coated with brilliant red powder, giving the appearance of blood. For the entire performance his tongue remains extended. Attached to his back is an enormous mandala covered with red cloth and lavishly decorated with silver moons, peacock feathers and gilded wood. As the priest blesses him, the spectators shower him with rice. Abruptly standing up, he charges at them. Children scream and challengingly throw bits of coconut leaves as he parades around the shrine. Whipping the mandala around and around, he plows through the crowd striking anyone who remains in his way.

"I feel no pain when I perform teyyam," says one performer. "Any soreness I may have disappears during that time. I am Camundi, not Perumalayan. I can do anything. I have so much strength I could defeat ten people at a time." Another performer relates: "During some parts of the performance my body feels very heavy. My spirit leaves me and flies up into the sky for a short moment and then returns. Other times I will see flashing lights off in the distance—usually red or green."

In trying to understand the kinds of inner processes these performers were undergoing during performance I asked them to draw pictures instead of verbalizing. Two sets of pictures were drawn by performers from different villages. The bottom pictures represent themselves as they feel they appear in everyday life. The corresponding pictures at the top represent themselves as they feel they appear in the forms of god. The differences between the top and bottom pictures are quite evident, not only in size, but in line quality and body configuration. The top pictures show arms outstretched, all embracing, feet firmly planted, stable, and covering more territory than those of the bottom. The smaller figures are indistinct almost amorphous, deformed.

In his altered state of consciousness, the performer demonstrates his divine possession in many ways: with the aid of his assistants, Visnumurthi is repeatedly thrown in and out of a blazing fire; Karin Camundi drinks the blood of sacrificial goats and chickens; Pottan Teyyam sits in a pile of smouldering coals and teasingly throws them at nearby spectators. Later, various events take place, each uniquely different, depending upon the teyyam being performed and geographic location. Every shrine has its own traditions. Some teyyams are paraded through the temple compound, riding on elaborately carved and painted wooden leopards and boars, that are mounted on wheels and drawn by the assistants of the teyyam. These great toy-like sculptures are left in the

compound at night for the spirits of the teyyam to ride. In the performance which propitiates Vayanattu Kulavan, members of the community go on a hunt into the surrounding forests to capture wild boar, deer and squirrels, that are brought back to the shrine to be consecrated by the teyyam. During epidemics, Visnumurthi visits each afflicted house to perform rituals to eradicate the disease.

When these activities are finished, the teyyam returns to the shrine and addresses the beneficiaries in a monolog that relates history of the *taravatu*, community, or individual household acting as beneficiary. He reveals where they came from, how they migrated to their present-day location; the name of the original *taravatu* house and the manner in which it divided, if it did; how many divisions there are and their respective names. He will describe the circumstances under which the teyyam became associated with the beneficiary.

The last section of the performance involves a second speech made by the teyyam in which each caste is addressed in order of its importance. Individuals of the various castes come before the teyyam and answer to his inquisition. "Did you worship me? Have you made sacrifices to me? Have you fulfilled all of your duties to me?" The teyyam assures each member that he will provide assistance and security during times of crises. Any problems, individual or communal, are now brought before the teyyam who takes the role of mediator. Today, most of the conflicts deal with property disputes, organizational or financial disagreements between priests and officials of the shrine and frictions arising among members of different castes. In Kotakkat a 2½ hour deliberation occurred between a Brahmin family and a former tenant family of low status who was attempting to claim land under the land reform act. The Brahmin family, upset by the possibility of losing land, prayed to Putiya Bhagavathi to bring affliction to the tenant family. Over a long period of time several members of the tenant family mysteriously died. At the night of the performance, some of the members came to make amends with the Brahmins and ask the teyyam to intercede on their behalf. Performers tell me that cases involving murder and robbery have been brought before the teyyam in the past.

In the closing section of the performance, the deity receives the offerings prepared for him and is approached by devotees who ask for favors, make vows, receive blessings and instructions for maintaining peaceful coexistence with the gods. The drums sound for the last time, and the spectators shower the teyyam with rice as he removes his headdress in front of the shrine. Assistants disassemble the costumes as quickly as possible. There is talking and laughter. One performer lights up a cigarette; another takes a break to buy tea and a snack at a nearby shop. Spectators gradually drift away. Some stop for breakfast on the way or buy a gift for a child at the festival market. Performers carefully pack all of their belongings and paraphernalia into their straw baskets. The offerings made to the deity—rice, bananas, coconuts, chicken—are collected and given to the performers; the *karnavan* pays each of them their fee. A stop at the local liquor shop is customary for many performers before moving onto their next engagement.

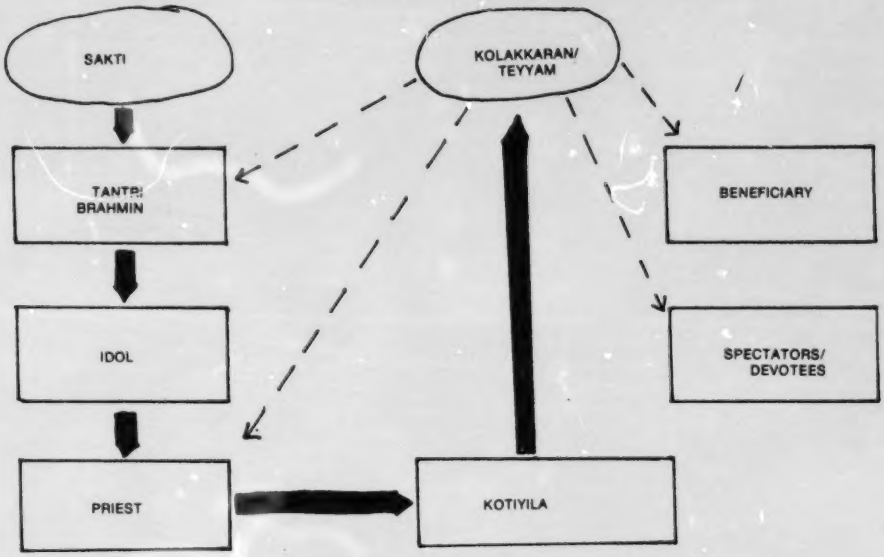
A diagram of one complete community performance will give an approximate picture of the time and organization involved in a single event. The performance at Karippodi honored nine teyyams over a period of five days (see chart).

On one plane, performance of *teyyam kettu* is about attaining benefits and future assurance from a very personal god in exchange for offerings, worship, and sacrifice. Performance of *teyyam kettu* belongs especially to the context of crises or potential crises—unanticipatable events with severe consequences and uncertain outcomes. The scheduled performances of regular events are designed to prevent crises. Unscheduled performances (*nercca kolam*) are staged to cope with unexpected crises and put events

	MUTAL (beginning)	NATUKALIYATTAM (middle)			MUTIYETUKKUNNA (removing the crown)
	Sunday	**Monday**	**Tuesday**	**Wednesday**	**Thursday**
DAY		Tottam of Visnumurthi is recited Tottam of Kannangatt Bhagavathi is recited Performer returns in complete costume and performs the teyyam Pullurnon Pullurkali teyyam is performed Muvalan Kuri Camundi teyyam is performed Vishnumurthi teyyam is performed	Kolaswarupath Thai teyyam is performed Narambil Bhagavathi teyyam is performed	Pullurkali teyyam is performed Muvalan Kuri Camundi teyyam is performed Muchilot Bhagavathi tottam is once more recited Tali Kettal (puberty rites for girls of the sponsoring community)	Pullurkali teyyam is performed And finally, the most important teyyam, Muchilot Bhagavathi is performed Pullurkali and Muchilot Bhagavathi, the two most important teyyams, engage in dialoguge. Both bless the community.
NIGHT	The tottam of Muchilot Bhagavathi is recited Vellattam (invocatory dance) of Pullurnon is performed Tottam of Pullurkali is recited Tottam of Muvalan Kuri Camundi is recited	Kannangatt Bhagavathi teyyam is performed Tottam of Kolaswarupath Thai is recited Tottam of Narambil Bhagavathi is recited	Now, the cycle repeats again, beginning with the tottam of Pullurkali Tottam of Muvalan Kuri Camundi is recited Tottam of Visnumurthi is recited A new teyyam is introduced, Pancuruli, and its tottam is recited	Kuthu (religious story telling) Vellattam (invocatory dance) of Pullurnon is performed again Visnumurthi teyyam is performed Pullurnon teyyam is performed Pancuruli teyyam is performed	

back on their proper course. And the performance serves another function—to perpetuate and renew a consistent social structure and distribution of power. This has been demonstrated by several examples: the transference of *sakti* and the consecration of the shrine by the Brahmin; the obligatory visit of the teyyam to the temple that houses the god of the higher caste; the allocation of special titles and gifts to the *kolakkaran* from the King; the presence and role of the Nair landowner; the calling out of the castes in order of ritual importance; and the spatial delineations of the event. But the performance also perpetuates wholeness and mutual interdependence. All work toward a common goal: to propitiate the teyyams and receive their blessings and benefits. The performance strengthens neighborhood solidarity, both horizontally, as among households, lineage and clan members of the same caste of equal status, and also vertically among members of different castes with differential status.

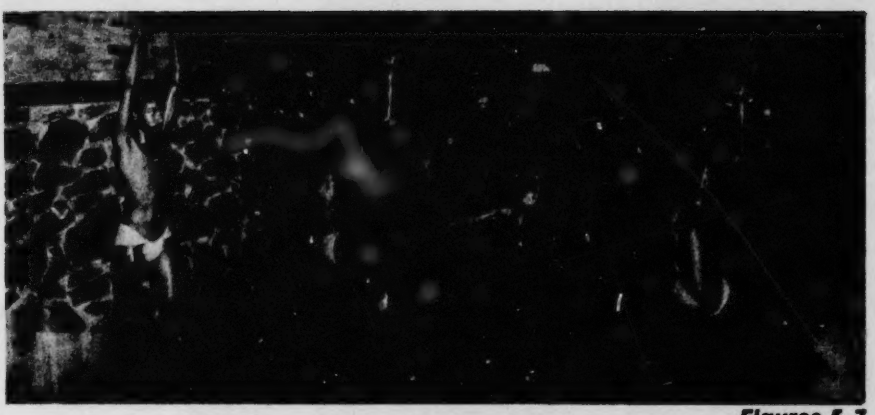
Another aspect of the performance is represented by the following diagram:



The picture shows the familiar ritual hierarchy—the Brahmin, the closest to the original source of *sakti*, and the power extending downward to the people through several intermediary stages: the tantri transfers *sakti* to the idol—the priest transfers *sakti* to the performer—and onward to the spectators, etc. The Brahmin is the crucial link between the *sakti* and the performer. But the picture shows something else too. The *kolakkaran*, the lowest member on the social plane, is elevated to the highest, making all those present, including those of the Brahmin and Nair communities, subservient to the transformed performer. During the performance this change in status is very evident. The teyyam receives maximum respect. Spectators and priests stand when they are approached by the teyyam and make humbling gestures to him. He addresses beneficiaries with titles that designate status equal to his own. His behavior is often impatient, hostile, and haughty. He is the absolute focus of attention, and participants are alert at all times to his every need. During a performance in Karivellur, one teyyam, fond of drinking, insisted that he leave to get some alcohol at the nearby liquor shop. After the beneficiary pleaded with the teyyam to remain at the shrine, he sent his son out to buy the alcohol. Only after drinking two bottles did the performance resume.

What is the meaning and function of this ritual inversion? When the performance is over everyone assumes his usual place in society. George Hart, in his *Poems of Ancient Tamil*, suggests that because the performances deal with very "dangerous" and "ambiguous" energies and powers capable of becoming uncontrollable and "vindictive," the lower orders are made to accept such positions. They make the environment "safe and orderly" thereby enabling the higher orders to rule more effectively. There are those who think the members of the lower castes were once the ruling indigenous people of the area who always had access to supernatural powers and were always the mediators between man and god. Only later were they made inferior to conquering invaders. These interpretations are not meant to reduce the performance of teyyam to any single "meaning," or to deny its primary force as a performance.

Wayne Ashley *is a graduate of the University of California, Santa Cruz, and has been leading collaborative research projects in India.*



Figures 5-7

Figures 13-15

Kalarippayatt, Martial Art of Kerala

by Phillip B. Zarrilli

At the start of the sixteenth century, Duarte Barbosa, one of the earliest Portugese to arrive in Kerala, a state in southwest India, provides a description of Kalarippayatt (meaning "place of exercise," referring to the technical system of training in its entirety. Kalari by itself means gymnasium or fencing school.) which although quaint is nevertheless still an apt account of this indigenous martial art system:

> *The more part of the Nairs, when they are seven years of age, are sent to schools, where they are taught many tricks of nimbleness and dexterity, there they teach them to dance and turn about and to twist on the ground, to take royal leaps and other leaps, and this they learn twice a day as long as they are children, and they become so loose jointed and supple that they make them turn their bodies contrary to nature; and when they are fully accomplished in this they teach them to play with the weapon to which they are most inclined, some with bows and arrows, some with poles to become spearmen, but most with sword and are ever practising . . .* Longworth Mansel Dames, ed., ***The Book of Duarte Barbosa, Vol. II.***

Initial Western reaction to Asian martial arts often takes the form of awed statements at the mastery of sheer physical technique.

What Barbosa does not mention about Kalarippayatt, and what is often not recognized as lying beyond the amazing "royal leaps" of such systems, is the highly integrated fusion of mental/visual concentration with the physical technique. Psycho-physical integration is the coordination of concentration, energy flow, and physical technique. Kalarippayatt, still taught today by a few gurukkals (teachers) in Kerala, could be part of any Western training program.

Kalarippayatt leads to muscle tone but not to hyperextension. The leg exercises, first singly and then in combinations, develop various skills; flexibility through gradual extension of the muscles; balance through centering and subtle body weight shifts from one exercise to another; and control through mastery of the complex leg movements themselves. The sequences further develop total body control as well as stamina, concentration, and focused energy flow. There is a total flow of energy choreographed in continuing movements through use of the feet, legs, back, hands, arms, head and eyes. The weapons system continues to build upon the preliminary mastery of the body, integrating exercises, poses, steps, jumps, kicks into immediate reflex responses demanding absolute visual and mental concentration.

Kalarippayatt demands daily practice, persistence, and encouragement. Progressing at his own rate, the student is encouraged and assisted by the teacher in overcoming the particular physical problems, tension points, and blocks to visual focus/concentration. As a system in which the student must preliminarily perfect a predetermined sequence of physical exercises and weapons techniques, Kalarippayatt at first appears restrictive. But through the gradual mastery of the form itself the performer's mind and body are freed into newly-found balance, control, and flexibility combined with directed energy flow. Even in its early stages of training, Kalarippayatt has an intrinsic interest for the student that comes, quite simply, from the challenge of mastering day-by-day his own body as well as advancing through a graded system.

Background

Kalarippayatt has been basically the same since the twelfth century. It synthesizes elements of the ancient all-Indian sciences of war (Dhanur Veda) and medicine (Ayurveda), at the same time transforming these through its own indigenously developed techniques of weapons use, exercises, and massage. At the height of its influence—from the fifteenth through the seventeenth centuries—Kalarippayatt was a regular part of the education of Nair youth (the Kerala military caste), who began training at the age of seven. But the system was not restricted to the military caste. Its practice quickly

proliferated across caste and religious boundaries with some Muslims, Christians, and Tiyyas (low caste Hindus) becoming well known graduates of their local community's kalari.

The martial art was so integral to medieval Kerala society that aspects of the system were woven into cultural life in such widely diverse performance forms as Kathakali dance-drama, Teyyam ritual, Christian Cavittu-Natakam dance-drama, Kolkali stick dance, Parisakali and Velakali sword and shield dances, and the Namboodiri Brahmin Yatrakali ritual-dramatic performance. Popular heroes and heroines trained in Kalarippayatt became the subjects of folk songs, some of which are still sung in the fields today. (These folk songs, the Northern Ballads, provide romantic stories for many Malayalam films. A 1977 film, *Unniarca*, is a typical glorification of late medieval heroes and heroines which distorts the practical function and austere beauty of Kalarippayatt.) The influx of European colonialists attempting to monopolize Kerala's rich spice trade brought increasing dependence upon firearms. The Kerala warriors, trained in a system designed for individual combat or duels, resisted the waves of Europeans struggling for control. With the advent of British supremacy in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Nairs were prohibited from training in their traditional disciplines, practicing their traditional role as warriors, and from carrying arms. It was only through the care of several gurukkals that the practice of Kalarippayatt was saved from extinction in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Today the art is taught by a few teachers. Students today range from eight to sixty years, though the majority are between sixteen and thirty, and are drawn from a wide variety of socioeconomic positions in society.

In spite of the worldwide attention focused upon Kathakali, the form most directly influenced by Kalarippayatt, the martial art has remained relatively unknown outside of India. Kathakali, which evolved during the seventeenth century, drew directly from the martial art its physical training of the body, unique system of massage with the feet (uliccil), distinctive battle choreography, and emphasis on the heroic rasa. The first actors of the dance-drama form were the kalari trained Nair warriors. These actor-warriors transformed Kalarippayatt body exercises, positions, floor patterns, etc. to fit the unique esthetic style and body position of the evolving dance-drama: the splayed knees, use of outsides of the feet, etc. (While the vigorous physicality of Kathakali is drawn from Kalarippayatt, its esthetically intricate use of hand gestures (mudras) and facial gesture is drawn from Kerala's Sanskrit temple-drama, Kutiyattam.)

Naturally, the Kalarippayatt system was designed to produce the proficient warrior. The maxim, "the weapon is only an extension of the body" (still told to students today), illustrates the close connection between preliminary physical training and advanced weapons practice. The primacy of physical culture is asserted from the first day of training when the student is introduced to an "alphabet" of leg exercises. Weapons training only comes after the student has gained proficiency in physical technique. The degree of advancement is closely monitored by the teacher who judges each student's progress in balance, control, flexibility, stamina, and immediacy of reflexes.

Development of the proper mental attitude is just as important as physical mastery. Kalarippayatt has no highly articulated philosophical system. While the art is not self-consciously yogic, mystical, or meditative, it does foster an attitude of reverence and respect for the individual's body/mind, for the tradition, for the deities who are believed to guard and protect the individual, and for the gurukkal's knowledge. At its best, the practice of the system nurtures in the student a fusion of mind and body, developed through concentration of attention, strict visual focus, and the individual's striving for mastery of the form's complexities; a sense of humility when the student realizes the skill, patience, and perseverance needed to become a master of the form; and a sense of well-being coming from the inner strength based on the individual's awareness that

he need fear no one. The teacher must have the innate ability to perceive the student's attitude that provides the foundation for progress in the system. If the teacher thinks that the student might misuse certain techniques, he will refuse to impart some of the more "secretive" elements of the system. Reverence and respect are absorbed more from the environment in the kalari and the teacher's approach to the discipline than from the system of instruction *per se*.

The Kalari Building

The cocoon-like kalari, enclosed against monsoon rains, drafts, and the tropical rays of the sun, provides a marked contrast to the outside world. The kalari traditionally serves the function of both training center and temple. The deities of the kalari play an integral part in the daily life of both teacher and students. In palm-leaf family manuscripts, strict requirements are set down regarding the site, dimensions, and construction of the kalari. In the past there were two types of kalaris, the payatt kalari, for practice and training, and the ankam kalari (somewhat larger), for mock fights or duels. Although kalaris varied in exact size, all were to be twice as long as wide, with the height of the roof the same as the width. All kalaris were to be built by digging 1 kol (2½ feet) into the ground. The earth dug out is used to build up the walls to a height of approximately five feet, or until the earth is used up. Except for the three-foot-wide opening on the eastern side, which consists of a stairway leading down into the enclosed practice area, the kalari is contained on all four sides by the earthworks. The roof is constructed from plaited coconut-palm leaves, supported by a bamboo framework. The kalari's pit-like construction provides a draftless atmosphere with a constant temperature.

The deities of the kalari range in number from seven to as many as twenty-one, depending upon the gurukkal's family tradition, or the community's local traditions. The presiding deity of the kalari, kalari bhagavati (the deity of war), is located in the kannu mula or southwest corner of the kalari, where she is lodged on the puttara, a raised platform of seven tiers (Figure #1). Other deities often include nagabhagavati (serpent god), ganapadi (elephant god), the pitham or tripod (representing past gurus), and antimahalan and vettaykkorumakan (incarnations of siva).

The ritual life of the kalari centers around daily worship of the deities, as well as special observances on days auspicious for the particular kalari. The gurukkal is revered as the direct representative of the deities, the living embodiment of the entire line of gurus represented by the pitham. As custodians of the art of war, the gurukkal is entitled to the same respect as the deities, a tradition popularly believed to extend to the teachers of the Dhanur Vedic tradition, such as Drona (the Pandavas' teacher in the Mahabharata).

The integral link between ritual life and daily training is even found in the physical exercises. The first body exercise sequence taught—the first sequence constructed from the beginning exercises—is the puttara tol (Figure #2). When performing this exercise the student is worshipping the deities with his body, a physical manifestation of the reverence for the traditions of the kalari, the line of gurukkals, and the protection from injury given by the deities. (The puttara tol sequence is essentially the same pattern used for mutual "salutes" prior to any combat sequence in the kalari (or in duels) with otta or sword and shield. The practice of mutual salutes illustrates the feudal nature of duels in Kerala.)

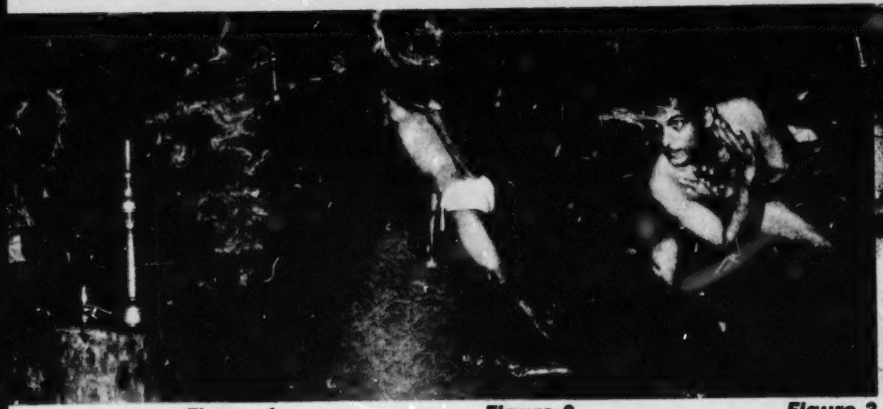


Figure 1

Figure 2

Figure 3

Figure 4

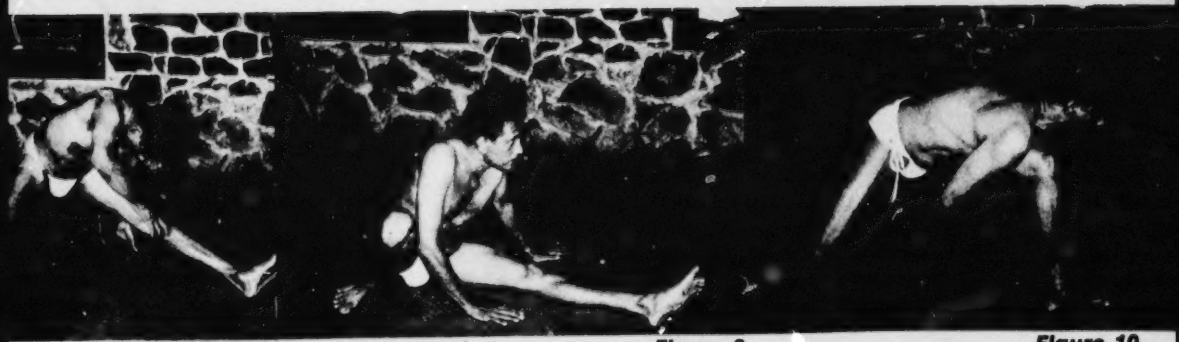


Figure 8

Figure 9

Figure 10

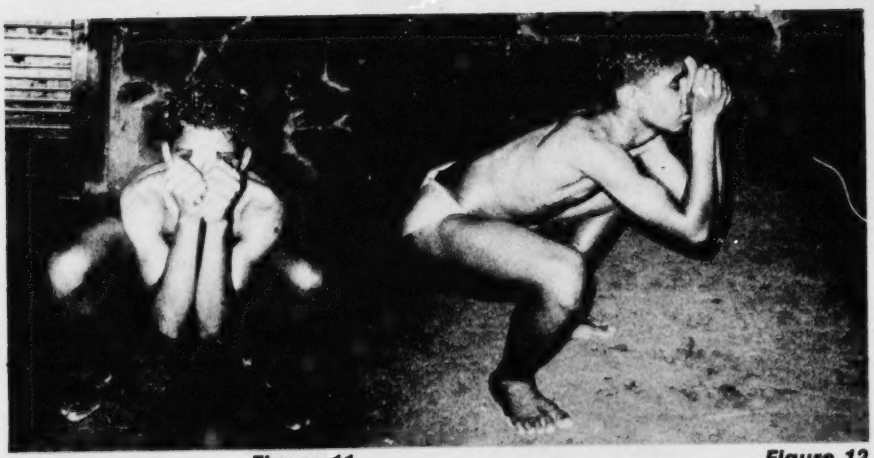


Figure 11

Figure 12

Kalari Cikitsa: The Medical System

As the kalari gurukkal is priest, so is he healer or physician. Traditional training of the gurukkal includes specialization in indigenous medical preparations and techniques for preventive health care and treatment. Built on the all-Indian Ayurvedic medical system, kalari cikitsa is an indigenously developed branch of treatments for kalari-related injuries such as bruises, bonefreaks, wounds, etc. As physician the gurukkal treats injuries to the body's marmas (vital spots), a system ultimately applied in combat—thrusts, blows, cuts are aimed at these most vital spots of the opponent. (The concept of marmas is developed in classical Ayurvedic practice through the surgical methods of Susruta, as recorded in his Samhita, the major source of Ayurvedic knowledge of surgery and anatomy. Marmas developed as a concept of regional anatomy which overcame the defects of an inadequate system of dissection. Susruta defined the marmas as "Firm unions of mamsa (muscles), sira (vessels), snayu (ligaments), asthi (bones), or santhi (bone-joints) . . . and these naturally and specifically form the seats of life (prana)." (*Ancient Indian Medicine* by P. Kutumbiah. There are usually 107 marmas listed. In Kalarippayatt 64 of these are considered the kula or most vital marmas and therefore play a role in martial training.) Treatment includes first aid for kalari or battlefield injuries, methods of extended care, and the special system of massage, uliccil.

The gurukkal uses the massage for three different purposes: (1) treatment of specific injuries, such as a sprain; (2) body control and flexibility in training; (3) yearly massage for general health purposes. Massage may be with hands, feet, forearms, or in combination, depending upon the purpose of the massage, diagnosis of condition, age, physique, and the patient's general health. Indigenously prepared medicinal oils are applied to the injured area prior to massage, or to the entire body for the Kalarippayatt training or general health massage. The oil preparation used in kalari training, kalari-mukkutt, consists of four parts gingely oil, two parts castor oil, one part ghee, three special herbs, three dried ingredients, for a total of nine elements, which are boiled and cooled before application. Applied to the entire body daily during martial training, this oil enters through the pores of the skin as the student perspires. Kathakali uliccil is given only with the feet except for the head and face areas. It has a slightly different combination in oil preparation: cocoanut oil, castor oil, buffalo ghee in equal proportions, mixed with a condiment (uluva, ground into a pasty substance), all of which is boiled and cooled before application. The Kathakali oil, valukk (literally "slippery") is said to give slightly more emphasis to the flexibility needed for form, while the kalari oil is designed to give maximum flexibility combined with strength; therefore, the difference in ingredients.

It should be noted that both the kalari and Kathakali oil preparations are passing out of active use, especially in daily practice, due to the expense of traditional preparations. Today students in both the martial art and dance-drama usually use gingely oil, readily available in any village market.

Traditionally uliccil lasted the first 14 days of training each year. Today, due to limited time for training, only a few advanced students receive the massage yearly. In the past training began with the onset of the monsoon, during June-July and lasted for two-four months. Occasionally those selected to become teachers trained throughout the year. During these first 14 days, and for the 14 days following massage, the student was instructed to refrain from sexual intercourse, not to sleep during the daytime, not to keep awake at night, and to include milk and ghee in his diet. On the 15th day the student was instructed to take a laxative to purge his system. The period of massage

Figure 16

Figure 17

Figure 18

Figure 19

Figure 20

Figure 21

Figure 22

Figure 23

was always the most intensive part of training. This unique synthesis of oil, massage, and physical exercise allow the student to develop maximum balance, control, and flexibility. Today students begin training on selected auspicious days and may study throughout the year at a few kalaris.

Techniques

During the period of preliminary training the student is introduced to the most basic level of the Kalarippayatt system, an alphabet of body poses, steps, and leg exercises. This alphabet of physical movements is taught in increasingly complex sequences as the student's proficiency increases. At first individual words, then sentences, will be constructed out of the alphabet of movements. Each day of kalari training begins with the recitation of this alphabet.

Leg Exercises (kal etupp)

First there are eight leg exercises. The student begins on the eastern side of the kalari and moves toward the west (the gurukkal's side), alternating right and left leg kicks of various types. From the first lesson the student is told to fix his eyes on a point at the opposite end of the kalari. This starts his training in full mental concentration and visual focus, eventually applied in weapons practice. Each leg exercise, although maximizing leg flexibility, is performed with the entire body. All kalari exercises bring the entire body into play.

The key method for achieving flexibility and body involvement is relaxation. Beginning Kalarippayatt students usually have tension-filled bodies, exaggerated by attempts to imitate the flexibility of advanced students. Students must be assisted in understanding that relaxation of the muscles, limitation of extraneous movement, and removal of "blocks" to extension produce flexibility.

The only tension point sometimes allowed is the small of the back. This is illustrated in the elephant pose (Figure # 11). This position needs tension for maintenance of the pose against an opponent using weapons.

The first leg exercise taught is nerkal, or the forward straight leg kick. The student stands on the eastern side of the kalari with the left foot forward (Figure # 5). Raising his arms, he interlocks the fingers, extending the arms fully, knuckles in an inverse position facing the head. (The inverse knuckle position, with hands locked, is for preliminary balance during beginning training. After sufficient mastery, the hands are freed for fuller coordination of total body movement in each exercise.) From this basic position, beginning with the right foot, the right leg is kicked forward, and raised as high as possible (Figure # 6-7). Ultimately the leg should be flexible enough for the knee to touch the shoulder and the hand to touch the extended foot. As the foot descends along the arc of the kick, the momentum of the descending leg is allowed to extend the leg behind the body, and again to swing forward in fron to the body. This forward movement becomes a step forward with the right foot. As this right step is taken, the left leg is then kicked exactly as the right. The alternation between right and left kicks moves the student across the kalari, east to west. The verbal commands given by the teacher to instruct the student, are simply, "valatu nere, itatu nere," or "right kick, left kick."

The fifth leg exercise, irutikal, or the "sitting-back-kick," is actually an extension of the first leg exercise, nerkal. Beginning exactly as above, the right straight leg kick is executed. However, as the leg descends along the arc of the kick, its backward movement behind the body stops as the right foot is planted in an extended position,

perpendicular to the line of the left foot (Figure # 8). As the right foot is planted in this position, the momentum of the downward swing provides continuous momentum for sitting backward (Figure # 9). The sitting movement is executed by keeping the body weight over the left leg. Once the right foot is planted, it is not moved. From the sitting position, the exercise is continued by bringing the body weight forward over the left leg (Figure # 10), returning to the original position. The right foot is then brought forward, taking a step, and the left leg is kicked as in the straight leg kick. The exercise continues with the left leg extended backward, sitting back, body weight over the right leg, etc. The verbal commands for this exercise are "valatu nere etutt irutti, itatu nere etutt irutti," or "right kick, sitting back; left kick, sitting back."

Body Control Exercise Sequences (Meippayatt)

When the student has mastered the beginning leg exercises, he is introduced to body control exercises. There are a total of 12 regular exercises, plus two specialized patterns, pakarcakkal meippayatt (a show piece of Kalarippayatt) and puttara tol (the worship of the deities). [Although meippayatt is technically the most correct name for the body exercise sequences, they are also variously called meyyorukkam (body preparation) and meivalakkam (body flexibility).] The first five regular sequences emphasize the legs and lower half of the body, drawing on the eight leg exercises in various combinations. 6 and 7 stress the hips and upper torso, while 8-12 concentrate on the hands, arms, and upper body—movements applicable in unarmed offense and defense.

The 6th and 7th meippavatt sequences concentrate on development of the hips and upper torso. The 7th sequence is perhaps the most difficult of all 12. It involves acrobatic twists, leaps, and jumps. Some of the movements in this sequence include a circling body back bend, combined with jumps (Figure # 16-20), a full back bend (Figure # 21), and a forward spiraling jump.

The student is also introduced to the other two elements in the basic Kalarippayatt alphabet, poses (vativukal or nilakal) and steps (cuvat). A total of eight poses and four steps are taught as needed in the graded series of meippayatt. The poses are not simply external body positions—they are attitudes to which and from which the body moves for offensive and defensive purposes. Each pose is filled with potential energy for further movement. The first pose learned is Gajavativ, or the "elephant pose" (Figure # 11-12). This pose is the beginning stance for each of the meippayatt. The potential for movement found in the poses is illustrated by the serpent pose (Sarpavativ, Figure # 13-15) which allows for a quick, low reversal of body position in a full 180 degree turn.

These eight poses had full power only when they united three elements: (1) the external body movements; (2) the repetition of sacred mantra associated with the pose; and (3) the execution of breathing techniques associated with particular poses. The mantras and breathing techniques were entrusted to only those students in whom the gurukkal placed his absolute trust. This threefold mastery of poses is largely forgotten today. A few gurukkals know some of the mantras and breathing techniques, but they are not practiced in combination.

The third set of kalari "letters" are the steps (cuvat), taught along with the first body exercise sequence. All movements of the feet and legs are from one of these four basic positions to another. Vattacuvat, or the feet-parallel position, is illustrated in the elephant pose (Figure # 11-12). Nittacuvat is illustrated in the serpent pose (Figure # 13-15), where one foot is forward, with body weight over the forward foot, and the opposite foot is extended backward, perpendicular to the line of the forward foot.

Individual meippayatt sequences are taught gradually. The student is first given the outer "shell" of the entire sequence, including instruction in poses, steps, leg exercises,

and any special turns, jumps, or leaps required by the specific sequence. Each body exercise sequence has a full set of vayttari or verbal commands, recited by the teacher, which lead the student through each of the sequences. Through repetition the sequence is mastered and the speed and increased. Speed was traditionally a test of the stamina and agility needed in combat.

Weapons Practice

As the student practices the leg exercises, progressing through the beginning levels of the 12 graded body exercise sequences, the gurukkal introduces him to the use of weapons. Students advance at their own pace. It may take a full year or more of repetition of leg exercises and the first body exercise sequence before the student is considered ready to take up the first weapon, the kettukari or staff.

Certain principles applicable to all kalari weapons techniques are taught in preliminary staff training. From the first time he takes the weapon in his hands, the student is instructed to maintain continuous direct eye contact with his opponent. This direct visual focus demands utmost concentration. There is no necessity for watching the opponent's movements, for they will always be within the wider circle of peripheral vision. As long as proper body position is maintained, the opponent can never move out of the direct line of visual focus. With proper training, the body is expected to respond automatically to the opponent's thrusts, cuts, etc. At advanced stages of combat, body and weapon movements are too swift to be followed by the eyes, so the individual has to understand the opponent's strategy, anticipating his movements by watching his eyes. The student is also taught that excess force is unnecessary in the wielding of weapons. The most important factor is to maintain total control of the body, and therefore of the weapon as an extension of the body. With correct body position, control, stamina, and agility, strength becomes secondary.

The kettukari involves the simplest sequences for attack and defense of any of the kalari weapons. Although valuable on its own, the staff also serves as an introduction to the spear. The kettukari, like all weapons except the otta, has 12 separate sequences (atav) taught in a graded series. The staff is a flexible, solid cane pole about one inch in diameter, and generally between five and six feet in length. Ideally the staff should be one hand span taller than the individual using the weapon. The staff is thoroughly oiled before use so that it can slide easily through the hands. Eventually the student is introduced to a variety of defensive and offensive maneuvers, from the underhand stomach thrust to the two-handed swinging cut at the opponent's ribs. As with all kalari weapons, progress in mastering basic techniques is coupled with increasing speed.

Due to its small size and light weight, the ceruvati(literally, "short stick") calls for much greater precision and quickness in use than the staff. The ceruvati is generally the second weapon learned. Advanced students and masters are able to exchange up to 100 blows per minute. The ceruvati demands close-quarter exchanges with the opponent, and therefore calls for more agility and total body use than does the staff. It prepares the student for use of the otta as well as the dagger. The ceruvati is usually made of resilient tamarind wood and is about 22 inches in length, tapering from the thicker handle end (1½-1¾ inches in diameter) to the tip (1-1⅛ inch in diameter). Cuts, thrusts, and blows are generally delivered to the opponent's head, ankles, and occasionally hands. Later sequences will add other thrusts, such as to the stomach. Cuts and blows are delivered either over the head or from the shoulders, with single or double hand grips. Because of the resiliency of the wood, the student is instructed to utilize the rebound power of the stick with each consecutive blow exchanged, producing, with practice, a continuous motion from one blow to the next.

Figure 24

The otta is 18-24 inches long, 2½ inches wide at the handle, tapering to 1½ inches at the tip and made of tamarind wood. The unique double curve of the otta leads to two separate grips, the double hand grip with the first curve pointed down (the eastern or student position), and the single-hand grip, first curve up (western or teacher position).

The otta was most likely the master weapon of a few North Malabar kalari families. It was not a part of all systems of kalari training. For those families that utilized the otta in their own system of training, it became indispensible to the kalari expert's training. The otta requires maximum flexibility, balance, and body control. All the blows, cuts, thrusts, and locks taught in otta practice can ultimately be applied in hand to hand combat with fists, forearms, hands, and elbows. Throughout otta training and in combat, the body is kept close to the ground. In otta practice, the weapon actually becomes an extension of the arms. The otta requires intimate knowledge of the kula (most vital) marmas. In practice, the most advanced student will be taught to apply the otta to the 64 kula marmas on the opponent's body. The centrality and complexity of the otta as the master kalari weapon is illustrated by the fact that it consists of 18 sequences, rather than the usual 12. Gaining mastery over the otta ultimately means complete mastery over the entire body, knowledge of and application of blows to the marmas, and mastery over the most complex and extensive set of duel sequences. Once the otta is learned, the master can apply methods of otta practice to any other weapon. Generally only the most trusted

of the kalari students are taught the ultimate application of the otta in hand to hand combat.

While the otta is the focal point of the Kalarippayatt system, sword and shield (val and parisa) use is the culminating point of kalari training. Sword and shield were the major combat weapons of the medieval Kerala soldier. Unlike Western fencing, with its erect body position, kalari sword and shield technique maximizes total body involvement. The flexibility and control of the body developed throughout the training gives the individual master the ability to hide his entire body behind a shield only 12-18 inches in diameter. The use of sword and shield demands absolute coordination, as well as visual and mental concentration. Sword and shield training produces the ability simultaneously to defend with the shield against an opponent's cuts, while executing sword cuts at the opponent from a basic figure-eight configuration. During the entire exchange, the student is expected to maintain direct visual contact with the opponent.

Other weapons in the system include the gada (mace), the heavy, unwieldy three-foot-long wooden club, made famous by Bhima of the Mahabharata; the spear; the dagger, a double-edged weapon used for both offensive and defensive purposes; and the urumi, a flexible sword three to four feet in length and sharp on both sides (traditionally used in mass combat). The system also teaches unarmed and hand-to-hand combat.

Kalarippayatt, like many of India's performing arts, is in a precarious situation today. Unlike other martial systems which have become lost in the post-British colonial period, Kalarippayatt still has a few master-gurukkals who preserve its traditional techniques and lore. Unfortunately some less than responsible teachers allow students to progress too quickly and to participate in public displays of combat before they have fully mastered their weapons. The best teachers, such as Gurukkal Govindankutty Nair at the C.V.N. Kalari in Trivandrum, preserve the necessary balance between advancement and tradition, allowing students to progress only when ready both mentally and physically.

Students under such capable teachers are few in number and are largely part-time. The vast complexities of the system require a minimum of four to six years full-time study to master. Without at least a few full-time students capable of learning the entire system, Kalarippayatt will lose many of its most important techniques.

Kalarippayatt is a unique training system for both the East and West today. There is training leading to balance, control, and flexibility of the mind and body. At various stages the student will overcome blocks in balance which have previously prevented proper execution of a kick; he will discover gradual extension; and he will encounter a new ease in continuous motion through focused energy flow. Psycho-physical integration becomes his foundation for self-awareness and for performance. No student of Kalarippayatt ever reaches the end, for the system lies before him infinite in its demands. But through the execution of the system the student eventually finds his own freedom.

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